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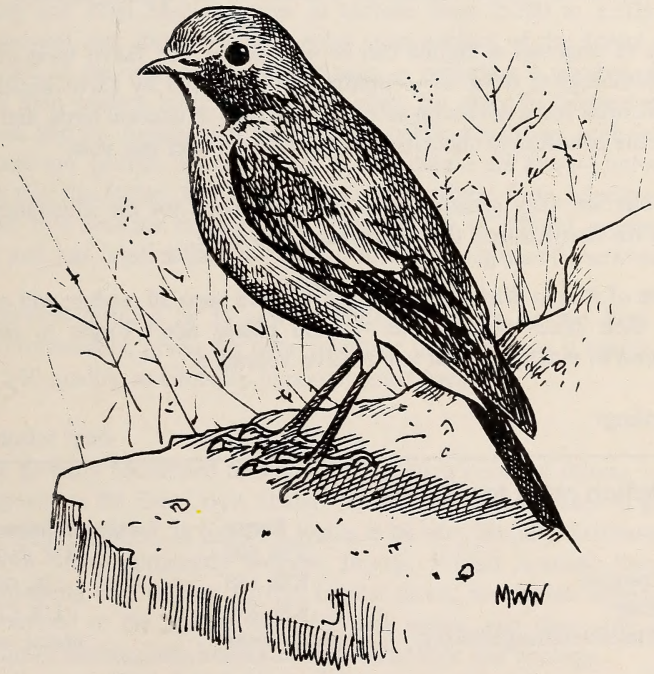

A joint publication of the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya and BirdLife Kenya.

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Editorial

Bird migration is one of the wonders of the natural world. That tiny birds weighing only a few grams can travel many thousands of kilometres, navigating with pinpoint accuracy to destinations they may never have seen before, is truly remarkable. This issue of *Kenya Birds* celebrates more than 25 years of bird ringing at Ngulia, Tsavo West. The work there of a small group of dedicated ornithologists has given us some insight into the strategies of the millions of migrant birds that pass over eastern Kenya each year. In this issue, Graeme Backhurst and David Pearson describe the history of Ngulia and what the ringing work has told us so far. Many fascinating questions remain — there is certainly lots of work to be done at Ngulia for at least the next quarter century!

The falls of migrants at Ngulia can be spectacular, but Tsavo West offers many other ornithological rewards — outlined in this issue by Dave Richards. Elsewhere, we offer some advice on submitting records of unusual birds, and on how to navigate the new Kenya checklist when it appears later this year.

The Editors are very grateful to Martin Woodcock for his illustrations, drawn specially for *Kenya Birds*, that accompany this issue.

This issue of *Kenya Birds* is the biggest yet. We hope all readers will continue to send in their notes and records — and please don't forget to renew your subscription to make sure that you receive Volume 5.

Good birding!

Subscription rates for Volume 5

	Kenya	*Abroad (airmail)*
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News from Kenya and abroad

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Department of Ornithology

Eldama Ravine forests

As part of survey work for the Important Bird Areas project, Ornithology Department staff visited highland forests close to Eldama Ravine during October and November 1995. A brief reconnaissance trip on 14–15 October was followed up by a more detailed survey from 24 October to 2 November.

These forests, which include the administrative blocks of Chemorogok, Chemususu and Maji Mazuri, range in altitude from 2,200 to 2,700 m. The surveys showed that they contain a good cross-section of the forest avifauna characteristic of the central Kenyan higlands — including a number of species that reach their eastern limit at the Rift Valley. No globally-threatened species were found, and the forests were generally in patchy condition, with large areas of scrub and low growth. Present levels of disturbance are low — unfortunately it appears that the forests have largely failed to recover from selective logging carried out two decades or more ago. The absence of natural regeneration is worrying and has implications for natural forest management elsewhere in the country.

The surveys resulted in 34 new or updated records for the *Bird Atlas of Kenya*. Unfortunately, given the poor condition of the forests it seems unlikely that they will qualify as Globally Important Bird Areas.

On the akalat trail

Of the six globally threatened bird species in Kenya's coastal forests, easily the most enigmatic is the East Coast Akalat. This dumpy little member of the thrush family is rarely recorded. In Kenya it seems to be very patchily distributed, being absent from many apparently suitable forests. Within Arabuko-Sokoke, the largest remaining tract of East African coastal forest, the akalats appeared to be mainly confined to the eastern Mixed Forest sector, and then only in a few places. Almost nothing was known of their behaviour and ecology.

Since October 1995 Department staff have been working with Research Associates Paul Matiku, an MPhil student from Moi University, and Erwin Nemeth from the Konrad Lorenz Institute, Vienna, on an akalat crackdown. The aim is to find out how many of the birds are actually in Arabuko-Sokoke, where in the forest they live, what their preferred habitat looks like, and how this may relate to their territorial, foraging and nesting behaviour.

To answer this question has required a division of effort. Matiku has been looking at the broad picture, using playback of calls to perform akalat censuses

across large chunks of the forest, then focusing on particular study blocks to look at densities in more detail. Nemeth has been concentrating on trapping and colour-ringing birds, then observing their behaviour; this gives information on many important aspects, including range sizes, foraging behaviour, micro-habitat use and interactions with other species.

The results are already surprising and interesting. Although akalats in the Mixed Forest are indeed very patchy, the birds are uniformly distributed at high densities throughout the *Cynometra* woodland — the same habitat favoured by the Sokoke Scops Owl. Based on preliminary results there may be far more akalats in Sokoke than previously imagined, possibly as many as 5,000 pairs.

The study has not been without difficulties. Akalats are very elusive (although they do respond well to playback) and the *Cynometra* forest is dense and often almost impenetrable. Luckily the fieldwork appears to have coincided with the birds' main breeding season in Sokoke, so they have been relatively active and vocal: it has also been possible to locate and observe a nest.

In the next stage of the study, Nemeth will be looking at populations of this species in the Shimba Hills and the East Usambara lowland forests in Tanzania, to compare population densities and see how well the habitat-selection model constructed for Sokoke fits elsewhere.

Threatened birds of East Africa

Work to identify Important Bird Areas (IBAs) is proceeding in Uganda and Tanzania as well as Kenya. The criteria for global IBAs are based, in part, on the presence of globally threatened or restricted-range bird species. But how about sites that contain species that are threatened within the region itself?

Concern to have a list of 'birds to watch' for East Africa — a regional Red Data List — led to this being one of the main topics for discussion during the annual regional meeting on biodiversity databases, held in Nairobi during September 1995. Participants drafted a set of criteria for listing such species, and tested them on a sub-set of East Africa's birds. A key idea behind the list is 'regional responsibility': i.e. where East Africa (which for this purpose will include Rwanda and Burundi) houses a significant part of a species' range or population. Species whose ranges only just creep into East Africa, or that are vagrants, will not be considered for the list.

Otherwise the criteria are based closely on those agreed recently by IUCN, and used by BirdLife International to define its revised list of globally threatened birds, 'Birds to Watch 2'. Working on a sample of around 10% of the region's birds, the group listed 22% of these (29 out of 130) in one or other category of threat. This corresponds well to accepted notions of 'rarity': 'rare' species are normally expected to make up around a fifth to a quarter of the total.

Groups in all three countries are now working through sections of the regional species list to see which species may qualify, and a final agreed list with notes will be produced at a meeting in Kampala in March 1996.

The categories of regional threat are listed below:

Critical in region	R-CR	(based on IUCN criteria)
Endangered in region	R-EN	(based on IUCN criteria)
Vulnerable in region	R-VU	(based on IUCN criteria)
Near-threatened	R-NT	Very close to vulnerable
Regional responsibility	R-RR	Species with at least 90% of range/population within political boundaries, and/or confined to coastal or Albertine Rift forest or papyrus, and/or with population dependent on a very few significant sites for breeding or during migration.

Important Bird Areas work in progress

The Important Bird Areas programme (see *Kenya Birds* 4(1)) has been moving ahead. Peter Njoroge joined the Ornithology Department in November 1995 as a Research Fellow working on IBAs full time. A draft list of IBAs based on the globally threatened and congregatory birds categories has been drawn up and circulated widely for comment. Detailed forms for each site that has been identified are now being completed. Important information is lacking for many sites, so a good deal of background research is required. Meanwhile, the new IBA Advisory Council is set to meet for the first time on 12 March 1996.

Hitting back at House Crows

Since its arrival in the 1940s, the Indian House Crow *Corvus splendens* has undergone explosive population growth and expansion of its range in Kenya. The species now occurs throughout the coastal strip, from Malindi south to the Tanzanian border and 50 km inland along the Nairobi road. Recent estimates of densities around Mombasa are as high as 24 birds/km^2. Intelligent and adaptable, the crows are a major predator of native birds, and harrass and drive away those species they cannot kill. They pose a public health risk and cause damage to crops and livestock. It is thought that, if left uncontrolled, Indian House Crows could become established in Nairobi within a few years. Eventually they could disperse over much of the African continent, devastating biodiversity and causing serious economic losses.

Systematic poisoning of the birds has already had some success on the north coast (see past issues of *Kenya Birds*). Now a closely supervised poisoning operation has been set up in the Mombasa hinterland, coordinated by the African Wildlife Foundation. The pest control project, which includes a baseline ecological survey on bird diversity, initially focuses on some of the worst hit

areas around Mariakani, Kaloleni and Mazeras. House Crow control expert Tony Archer will be supervising the poisoning operation.

From 16–20 November 1995, James Wachira and I made a baseline survey of birds covering a wide range of habitat types and land uses around the village of Mariakani. Steaming temperatures during the day, and the noise of nightclub revelry until the small hours of the night, made the task something of an endurance test. Nonetheless a total of 122 bird species was recorded, 24 of which are new for the Bird Atlas square QDS 102C and one for QDS 102D. Many of these were real surprises — who would think that Hadada Ibis had never been recorded only a matter of metres from the main Nairobi-Mombasa road! Indian House Crows were mainly found in coconut palm plantations or perched on telephone wires, talking to their friends, with smaller numbers in bushland and areas of open grassland. If additional funding comes through, the survey will be repeated at intervals after the poisoning operation. We hope this will show a substantial increase in the populations of indigenous birds. — *Luc Lens, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Kestrel research

From 5–23 October 1995 Anthony van Zyl (from the Transvaal Museum), Sally Newton and George Amutete collected data on time budgets of Rock Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* at Baringo. Anthony's study is investigating the effects of latitude on kestrel densities and behaviour. We had initially hoped that the birds would be breeding at this time, but we only observed intensive mating. This indicated that the breeding season was close, and might begin around early December. The unexpected shift in the breeding season prompted us to do an eight-day intensive cliff survey to be done in the study area first. The cliff survey was followed by time-budget investigations. Six kestrels were observed for at least ten hours each. It was difficult to track them for long without radio transmitters for they seemed to forage far away from the cliffs. Most discouraging was when one would climb to the top of the hot, 80 m-high cliff but the kestrel would refuse to reappear even after a two-hour walk through the bruising 'wait a bit' thorns! Nonetheless, over ten-and-a-half hours continous observation on a single bird was achieved in one day. More observations are planned when the birds eventually get around to breeding — *George Amutete, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Kori glory?

Research Fellow Peter Njoroge spent October 1995 at the National Avian Research Centre (NARC) in Dubai gaining experience in capturing and handling bustards safely (see story below). NARC has sophisticated captive breeding

facilities for several bustard species, and a programme to release captive-bred Houbara Bustards into the wild.

All bustard species in Kenya seem to be in decline — they need large areas of undisturbed habitat, and are suffering from ever more intensive land use by people. Unfortunately, little is known about their biology, including their movements, which makes conservation planning difficult. Kori Bustards, one of Kenyas largest and most spectacular birds, are thought to make extensive local movements in search of food, but these are very poorly understood.

With assistance from NARC experts, the Department now hopes to capture several Koris (which may be the tricky bit!) and fit them with satellite transmitters. Their movements can then be tracked continuously and, with luck, the birds themselves traced on the ground to investigate their activities in more detail.

Big bustards...

During October 1995 I spent four weeks on attachment at the National Avian Research Center, Abu Dhabi. My visit to NARC was necessary as preparation for a satellite tracking project on Kori Bustards in Kenya. This is a joint project between NARC and the National Museums of Kenya, and was initiated by the Steppe and Grassland Birds Specialist Group of Birdlife International. The project aims to shed some light on the movements of Kori Bustards in East Africa — when the birds move, how much, and why. Tracking Kori Bustards by satellite should allow these questions to be answered — something that would be next to impossible with any other method. It will also test the feasibility of satellite tracking of other rare or threatened larger bustards such as the Arabian, Heuglin's and Denham's Bustards (and even other birds such as Lesser Flamingos), through developing capture techniques and transmitter-fitting methods. Finally it is hoped that the study will arouse interest in bustard studies in Africa. During my attachment I learned how to capture and handle large bustards and fit them with transmitters, and how to collect blood samples and other specimens for the bustard veterinary database maintained at NARC.

NARC's major efforts at the moment are directed at the conservation and management of the Houbara Bustard and its habitat. However, other bustards are also being held for captive breeding. These include Kori, White-bellied, Rufous-crested, Black-bellied and Heuglin's Bustards. Only the first three have been bred in captivity. NARC has Veterinary, Ecology and Aviculture departments. The Veterinary department carries out research in bustard diseases as well as providing health care for the captive birds. The Aviculture department is responsible for the bustard captive breeding program. The Ecology department studies all ecological aspects of the bustards. Research being carried out by this

department covers satellite tracking of Houbara, feeding ecology, ecophysiology, predator responses of captive bred Houbaras, and Houbara habitat restoration. Within the same department there is a detailed Geographic Information System for integrating data from all these projects. The department plans to expand its scope soon by starting a population ecology and genetics project.

My work at NARC included handling bustard chicks, subadults and adults (quite a handful in the case of Koris!); clinical observations; weighing; and collection of routine samples such as ectoparasites, blood and faeces. I was also instructed in various anaesthetic technics and their advantages and disadvantages.

Though the Ecology department was not engaged in fieldwork while I was there, I learned a lot through discussions with various members of staff. So far they have managed to carry out the first successful satellite tracking of the Houbara Bustards. This has helped them show that the Arabian race of the Houbara (*macqueenii*) does not occur as widely distributed metapopulations/ subpopulations but as one population with an extensive range. I was impressed and very enlightened by the use of GIS in this department for integrating information from different sources or studies, for later application in the management of Houbara populations. Under instruction from this department I undertook transmitter-fitting trials and preparation of harnesses prior to bustard capture.

Finally I spared some time for 'twitching' in the desert, and managed to tick off my life list species such as Barbary Falcon and Desert Lark.

Thanks to Professor John Cooper and NARC for making this internship possible. — *Peter Njoroge, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Looking Sharpe

Mucai Muchane, who is studying for his MPhil degree in Zoology at Moi University, has begun a six-month study of Sharpe's Longclaw near Heni in South Kinangop.

The study is designed to answer some of the questions raised during the Department's monthly surveys of this Kenyan grassland endemic. Mucai will be mapping all the longclaw territories in a relatively small area of pasture and farmland and carrying out intensive censuses to determine population sizes and movements. He will also be following individual birds to monitor behaviour and micro-habitat preferences. Mucai's work is supported by a grant from BirdLife Kenya.

Ngulia records tumble

Two groups from the Department and the Nairobi Ringing Group joined other ringers from Britain, Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany for the annual

ringing program at Ngulia, Tsavo West in an incredible season when nearly all previous Ngulia records were broken.

During November, conditions were almost perfect with night after night of ideal foggy weather bringing down huge numbers of birds. Over the week that the first group was visiting, more than 10,000 migrants were ringed — over 3,100 in a single day! The diversity of species was also remarkable, with Marsh Warblers for once not dominating the scene. Sprossers were particularly abundant but *Hippolais* warblers, especially Olive-tree Warblers, were also unusually numerous. Good numbers of nightjars (Slender-tailed, Dusky, Donaldson-Smith's, Plain and all three races of Eurasian) and the three species of migrant wheatears were ringed. Other highlights during that week were a Eurasian Scops Owl and an immature Red-naped Bush Shrike.

During the December visit, migrant numbers were begining to tail off and conditions weren't quite as good as in November. Despite this we caught around 2,000 birds, the majority now being Marsh Warblers — including the excitement of one wearing a Belgian ring! Basra Reed Warblers and Garden Warblers were relatively well represented, but Reed Warblers and Blackcaps were, unusually, absent (only one Reed Warbler was ringed in the whole season and no Blackcaps).

By the end of the season, the incredible total of over 29,000 migrants had been caught and ringed, 12,000 more than the previous maximum at Ngulia. The experience gained by those who went was again invaluable and much enjoyed. Thanks go to Ngulia Ringing Group, in particular David Pearson and Graeme Backhurst, for help in arranging and covering costs for the two trips; the manager of Ngulia Lodge for her assistance with organising accommodation; and the Kenya Museum Society for sponsorship that made the visits possible. — *Colin Jackson, P O Box 40658, Nairobi*

Back to school for Ornithology staff

Staff member Joseph Oyugi and Research Fellow Alfred Simiyu began a two-year MPhil programme in Wildlife Management at Moi University in November 1995. Oyugi is planning to carry out his field research on forest birds in Kakamega; Simiyu will work on gamebirds in Kajiado, with sponsorship from the African Wildlife Foundation.

Ornithological Sub-committee

Checklist Mark 3 on the way

The new East African list of birds has now been agreed by the Ornithological Sub-committee. Unlike the previous standard list it is in taxonomic sequence at

all levels (with closely related species grouped together) and incorporates all the widely accepted changes in nomenclature since 1980. It will be produced as country checklists as in the past, and the Kenya checklist (third edition) is expected to be published and widely available by May 1996. The new checklist will indicate species that are rarely or very rarely recorded, for which all records must have supporting details, and those for which records are requested for the annual bird report. It will also indicate migrants. Species will be numbered according to the sequence on the new East African list.

***Scopus* 19(1)**

The latest issue of *Scopus* has a strong emphasis on Tanzanian forest birds, with articles on the birds of Kahe II Forest Reserve (Cordiero et al.), the North Pare Mountains (Cordiero and Kiure), the raptors of Mt Kilimanjaro (Grimshaw) and the birds of Gombe National Park (Stanford and Msuya). There is also a detailed account of waterbird distribution and abundance in the tidal creeks and estuaries of the south Kenya coast (Seys et al.): recommended reading!

BirdLife Kenya

World Birdwatch '95

On 7–8 October 1995 an estimated million people around the world again took part in a giant global birdwatch — a follow on to the very successful event held in 1993. World Birdwatch was a celebration of birds and an alert to the threats they face from habitat destruction, coordinated as before by BirdLife International.

On Saturday 7 October more than a hundred people thronged the Louis Leakey Hall for a bird identification workshop led by staff of the Department of Ornithology. Participants learned the basic tricks of the trade: how to take notes on unfamiliar birds, use field guides, and attract birds to their own compounds with food and water. Videos and a slide show followed in the afternoon. On Sunday morning there were parallel birdwalks in Kisumu (led by Jeam Agutu, Mombasa (led by Marlene Reid and Lorna Depew) and Nairobi. In the capital around eighty birders braved the early drizzle and split into groups to watch at ten sites scattered across the city. A special childrens' group led by Fleur Ng'weno visited Nairobi Dam and by all accounts had a great time. In just three hours of birding we recorded no fewer than 218 species, more than a fifth of the national total and an extraordinary number for a large capital city.

The highest site total, 96 species, was recorded in the grassland and seasonal pools near the Carnivore Restaurant in Langata. This site is also extremely rich in plant and insect life, and it has been proposed as a Biodiversity Park for the city

of Nairobi — a suggestion backed by the Kenya Wildlife Service. Unfortunately the land is up for sale and looks more likely to be swallowed up by development than turned into a recreation ground for future generations of Nairobians.

Meanwhile, birders outside the big urban centres were not forgotten. The launch of National Birdmap involved around 37 teams all over the country watching in their favourite 'patches', from Tiwi to Tigoni, from Shimba to Samburu, and sending their species lists back to the Ornithology Department. A special checklist was designed for the event, which tested procedures for the Department's biogeographic database.

Across the country we recorded around 550 species. This total is not just of academic interest — the Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation of Japan had agreed to donate $10 for each bird species seen anywhere in the world during the Birdwatch. Our efforts in Kenya have therefore raised more than KSh 200,000/= for birds, which will be targeted at pressing conservation problems in the Asian region.

Thanks from BirdLife Kenya to all those who took part in World Birdwatch, who helped in its organisation and who assisted with sponsorship of transport and publicity — especially Sarova Hotels, Kenya Wildlife Trails and the Weekly Review.

Support to students

BirdLife Kenya has only modest resources, but sometimes a small amount can go a long way. Top-up funds have been granted to two students working on threatened bird species, allowing them to carry out more fieldwork in the time available. The money goes to support Paul Matiku's study of the East Coast Akalat in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest and Mucai Muchane's work on Sharpe's Longclaw on the Kinangop Plateau. David Ngala of the Forest Department will also receive a grant so that he can continue his monitoring of Sokoke Scops Owls and other birds in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest. In 1994 David obtained the first breeding record for the owls when he found a juvenile bird with its parents (see *Kenya Birds* 3(1)).

Support also went to the Wednesday Morning Birdwalk in the form of a brace of van Perlo's new field guide, and of the excellent new edition of the European field guide by Heinzel, Fitter and Parslow. The books were carried to Kenya by Jim Stevenson and Ken Smith of the RSPB International Department, who also kindly donated several pairs of binoculars to the birdwalk. Jim and Ken found time in their short visit to go birdwatching with birdwalk leader Fleur Ng'weno at the proposed Biodiversity Park. The site did not disappoint, turning up Tree Pipits, a Honey Buzzard and a Peregrine Falcon among many other species.

Kenya Wetlands Working Group

Wetland inventory and documentation projects begin

KWWG will begin two major projects in January 1996. The Global Environment Facility, through the GEF/FAO Regional Biodiversity Project, is supporting further work on an inventory of Kenyan wetlands. This will include upgrading and restructuring the existing database, producing a streamlined version of the wetlands questionnaire and (in collaboration with Moi University, Eldoret) producing a detailed inventory of the wetlands of Uasin Gishu District. The Uasin Gishu work will provide an opportunity for Moi University students to gain experience in wetland survey, and provide information on the interesting but little-known wetlands of this region. An ethnobotanical study will run in parallel with the biological inventory work.

Meanwhile, the Netherlands Government is providing funds for the group to build up a documentation collection on Kenyan wetlands. This will involve collecting bibliographic references and (wherever possible) copies of material on wetlands in Kenya. The intention is to bring information on wetlands, which at the moment is scattered and hard to trace, into one central location where access is easy.

To help with the project work, KWWG has taken on three new Research Fellows, namely Peter Njuguna (wetland inventory), Richard Odongo (ethnobotany) and Charles Maina (documentation).

Lesser Flamingos do it again

An aerial survey of Lesser Flamingos on Lake Natron in late November 1995 has revealed another major breeding event — apparently the fourth year in succession that the birds have successfully bred at the lake.

Geoffrey Howard and Rob Olivier overflew the lake for 85 minutes in a small aircraft on 25 November 1995 and counted around a million flamingos, most of them on the western shore (330,000 birds) and in the north-eastern part of the southern lagoon, near a cluster of springs (530,000 birds). Both these groups contained large numbers of immature, white and grey, flightless young flamingos.

A 3-km long band of recently-used nests was seen near the northern edge of the southern lagoon. Several dead chicks seen on the eastern shore during an earlier visit, on 25 October, suggested that breeding probably began in late August or early September.

The survey highlights the need for regular monitoring of Lake Natron — particularly if the Tanzania Government goes ahead with plans to build a soda-extraction plant on the lake.

International

Wetlands International is born

A new global force for wetland conservation was created in October 1995, by the decision of three existing international 'wetland' organisations to integrate. The new organisation will be called Wetlands International. The founder organisations are the Asian Wetland Bureau (AWB, with operational headquarters in Malaysia), the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB, with operational headquarters in the United Kingdom), and Wetlands for the Americas (WA, with operational headquarters in North America and Argentina).

This integration has been planned for several years, in recognition of the need for new initiatives and stronger partnerships to address the continuing loss and degradation of wetlands, worldwide. The final decision to integrate occurred during joint governing body meetings during the International Conference on Wetlands and Development that was held in Malaysia in October 1995.

The integration of AWB, IWRB and WA to form Wetlands International draws together, and builds upon, the strengths and achievements of the three founding organisations, which date back more than 40 years. These achievements have included a key role in the development and technical support of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, major regional assessments of the status of wetlands and wetland species, research and conservation measures for migratory waterbirds, support to regional and national action plans for the conservation of wetlands and wetland species, training programmes in wetland management, and dissemination of information and awareness materials.

The Mission of Wetlands International is "To sustain and restore wetlands, their resources and biodiversity for future generations through research, information exchange and conservation activities, worldwide."

Wetlands International has non-profit/charitable status, and is governed by a global Board, comprising representatives of member countries, international organisations and wetland specialists. The regional operations for Asia/Pacific, Africa/Middle East, and the Americas are governed by separate regional Councils. Overall coordination is provided by a small International Coordination Unit, initially co-located with the headquarters for the Africa/Europe/Middle East region.

New illadopsis for East Africa

Puvel's Illadopsis *Trichastoma puveli* has been discovered in the Budongo Forest of western Uganda by Isaiah Owiunji and Andrew Plumptre — the first records for East Africa. At least 18 of the birds have been caught in mist-nets in the

isolated forest block of Kaniyo-Pabidi, where Owiunji has been carrying out fieldwork for his MSc. Identification initially proved a problem: the birds were much bigger than other illadopsis species in the forest, and fitted nothing on the East African list. In the end, two specimens of the mystery bird were sent to Nairobi. They were confirmed as Puvel's when Luc Lens of the Ornithology Department carried them to Belgium for checking against the large collection of central African birds in Tervuren.

Since then, Owiunji has managed to tape the species' call — a musical six-note whistle quite different from other East African species. The bird seems to be quite common in this particular forest block, but has so far not been recorded anywhere else in Budongo.

For the benefit of Illadopsis enthusiasts, Puvel's is a large, dark species that can be identified by its especially long, strong legs and bill; it appears to spend most of its time on the ground. The race found in Uganda, *strenuipes*, occurs from Nigeria through to north-eastern Zaire, so it is only a short hop over to Budongo, which holds several other western species not found elsewhere in Uganda.

Staff changes at BirdLife International

Nonie Coulthard, who for six years headed the Africa Programme at BirdLife International, has recently left the organisation. She will be moving to Edinburgh, Scotland, to work as a freelance environmental consultant. Nonie will be much missed by everyone involved with BirdLife and we wish her all the best in her new career. Gary Allport has been appointed to replace her as Head of Programme. Gary has wide experience of bird research and conservation in Africa, dating back to an Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Expedition in 1983 that also involved two *Kenya Birds* editors!

Lesser Grey Shrike — *Martin Woodcock*

Birding in Tsavo West National Park

Dave Richards
P O Box 24545, Nairobi

Most of Tsavo West National Park consists of dry thorn bush interspersed with an occasional Baobab tree, but along the Tsavo River and the area around and downstream of Mzima Springs there is lush vegetation.

At first glance while driving through Tsavo there does not appear to be much birdlife, apart from an occasional Lilac-breasted Roller, Long-tailed Fiscal or Red-winged Bush Lark sitting in a Baobab tree. But stop almost anywhere and you are sure to find birds. You will almost certainly hear the pretty, trilling song of a Pink-breasted Lark and you will soon be able to locate it singing high in a bush. Nearby you may also see a Fawn-coloured Lark, with its big white supercilium, so you can immediately compare these two quite common larks together. By now you will also be hearing the harsh scolding call of the Rattling Cisticola, which is the easiest way of identifying this member of a difficult group of birds, so often referred to as LBJs (Little Brown Jobs!). Another of this family to look out for in Tsavo is the Ashy Cisticola, which differs by being paler and more uniform in colour, with a pleasant, almost warbler-like, song which it delivers from the top of a bush. One more member of the warbler family to look out for is the shy Grey Wren Warbler; with patience they can usually be observed as they creep about low in the thorn bush scrub. Also often seen is the dainty Yellow-bellied Eremomela, a tiny bird with a big name!

On the tops of any of the taller bushes or in the branches of a Baobab look for the tiny, shrike-like Pygmy Falcon, Africa's smallest bird of prey. These minuscule raptors often take over the untidy stick nests of the White-headed Buffalo Weaver, which, along with those of the Red-billed Buffalo Weaver, are a common site in Tsavo's Baobabs.

On the lower branches there will almost certainly be a Drongo hawking for insects. The Drongo can be quite a fierce bird in defending its territory, particularly when breeding: even birds as large as the Bateleur Eagle are chased away!

The squeaky song of the White-browed Sparrow Weaver is a characteristic sound of Tsavo, wherever there are sizeable trees. And also in the trees, particularly Baobabs, look out for hornbills: Grey, Red-billed and Von der Decken's all prefer to live here. Near the tops of many Baobabs are the nests of Wahlberg's or Tawny Eagles. At times starlings can be very common: Wattled, Fischer's and the shy and stunning Golden-breasted are all found in Tsavo.

March and April are perhaps the most exciting times to visit Tsavo. At this time Eurasian migrants, many of them in full breeding colour, are passing through on their way north. The most obvious are Eurasian Rollers, Common, Isabelline and Pied Wheatears, and Red-backed and Red-tailed Shrikes, all easy to see as they perch on the tops of thorn bushes. Migrants are also abundant during November-December, the main Ngulia ringing season. If the 'short' rains have been good, the park can be beautifully green, the lush foliage of the bush contrasting splendidly with the red rocks and soil.

The tourist lodges are always good for birds, with Superb, Hildebrant's and Blue-eared Glossy Starlings ever-present. The lodge gardens, planted with colourful flowering bushes, attract a variety of sunbirds including Smaller Black-bellied and Little Purple-banded, as well as the more common Scarlet-chested and Amethyst.

While relaxing and sipping a cool drink at any of the lodges, always have your binoculars at hand as many interesting birds of prey and vultures can usually be seen soaring by, including Augur Buzzards, African Hawk Eagles, Tawny and Steppe Eagles, Martial Eagles and the best-known and most gracious soarer of them all, the Bateleur. Also look out for Peregrines and White-necked Ravens, which are often present.

For many people, Tsavo West's most exciting place for birds is Mzima Springs and the area downstream, a lush region of Doum Palms, Acacia trees and reeds which contrasts so strongly with the surrounding thorn bush. Get there early before the tourist rush starts and you are sure to see a variety of birds. If your luck is in, you may see a Finfoot or perhaps a Darter, a bird which has in recent times become quite scarce in Kenya. Among the reeds look for Black Crakes and the shy and secretive Green-backed Heron, or a Little Bittern. You are almost certain to see that jewel of the waterside, a Malachite Kingfisher. Other kingfishers to look out for are Chestnut-bellied and the tiny Pygmy, both of which feed on the abundant insects that occur near the water's edge.

Finally, Lake Jipe, my own favourite area in Tsavo. Although most of the lake shore is lined with dense reed beds there are a number of open bays which always hold a wide variety of birds. The heron family is always well represented, including Black Herons which perform their well-known act of spreading their wings over their heads while searching for fish. Special birds to look out for here are Pygmy Goose, Purple Gallinule and Lesser Jacana. During March and April Jipe is particularly good for migrant waders and terns, and graceful Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters swoop over the water.

How to get there, where to stay

Tsavo is not really accessible without your own transport. Most of the major roads in the park are in good repair, but vehicles with little ground clearance may have problems in some places, and a few areas (including the Ngulia Valley) become seriously sticky during the rains. Distances within the park are substantial and you should not exceed the set speed limits — allow plenty of time to reach your destination after entering the park.

Major tourist lodges include Ngulia, Kilaguni and Lake Jipe, all of which offer excellent accommodation but are not for the visitor on a tight budget. Self-catering accommodation is available at the Ngulia Bandas, which have a spectacular view over the Ngulia Valley, and Kitani Bandas. There are several special campsites along the Tsavo River.

Boat trips on Lake Jipe are easily arranged: make enquiries at the boat jetty or at Lake Jipe Lodge.

Records and Notes

Compiled by Colin Jackson
P O Box 40658, Nairobi

This section exists for the rapid publication of interesting observations, and contributions are welcomed. If you are sending in records for *Kenya Birds*, please consider the following guidelines. For breeding records, send in cases of confirmed breeding, i.e. birds incubating eggs or feeding nestlings/fledglings. Records for confirmed breeding are useful for ALL species, even the most common ones; records of nest-building, courtship etc. are only needed for rare species or ones where there are few breeding records. Interesting records will be published here and the others stored by the EANHS for analysis of breeding seasons, success rates, habitat requirements etc. You are strongly urged to fill in a nest-record card at the same time. Much more detail can be recorded on a card, and if your record can be added to the card collection then it is of permanent value. Cards can be obtained free of charge from the EANHS Nest Record Scheme Organiser (see back page). A report listing records submitted to the scheme is published every second year in the Annual Bird Report of *Scopus*.

For other records of Afrotropical, oceanic and Palaearctic birds, please send in any observations and notes that you think are of interest (e.g. earliest/latest dates for Palaearctic/intra-African migrants, unusual records for your area). The Editors will select records for publication according to the space available. For all records, including breeding records, please be as *precise as possible* about dates and locations. If you have sightings from places not easily found on the map, please take the trouble to give the latitude and longitude of the site to as much precision as you can (preferably the nearest second of arc or better). This will allow us to use these as we update the Bird Atlas of Kenya by computerised bird distribution records.

Supporting details and descriptions are always welcome for unusual records and will improve the chances of publication (*see this issue for suggestions on how to submit a record*). Records of certain species are requested for inclusion in the *Scopus* Annual Bird Report (the third issue of *Scopus* each year). These should be sent to Don Turner (P O Box 48019, Nairobi). who can also supply information on which records are required. For particularly unusual sightings supporting details (i.e. field notes, photographs etc.) will be needed for scrutiny by the OS-C Rarities Committee.

Key to records

New atlas square records are indicated in brackets. Codes are: **pres**, present (first record); **post pres,** present (first post- 1970 record); **prob**, probably breeding; **conf,** confirmed breeding; **post conf,** confirmed breeding (first since 1970); e.g. (pres, conf 25B) indicates that the species is present and confirmed as breeding in square 25B.

Where scientific names are not stated here (and elsewhere in Kenya Birds) the English names follow Britton (ed.) 1980, *Birds of East Africa.*

Overview

The past six months have produced yet another list of interesting and often new records. Even now, over ten years since the main fieldwork was undertaken for the *Bird Atlas of Kenya*, there are still many new records for the QSD squares — though with a number dating back to 1983 which we have only recently received. Several of these are from the Lamu square and involve unusual freshwater species that were present on extensive temporary freshwater pools at that time. Other highlights include the now famous **Shoebill** turning up in Nairobi, not more than 4–5 km from the city centre (!) and an observation of the local and little known **Abbott's Starling** in Gatamayu Forest. A flock of 50+ **Amur** (Eastern Red-footed) **Falcons** on Laikipia was a good record in a year when numbers of migrant falcons seem to have been lower than usual. Eurasian Hobbies in particular have been conspicuous by their absence. Dandora Sewage Ponds may not be the sweetest smelling of birding sites but it certainly turns up some good birds. There was a **Whimbrel** in October (the second record for Nairobi) and both **Teal** and **Tufted Duck** during the Waterbird Count on 3 January 1996. Other sites that often hold unusual species include Biodiversity Park (Carnivore Pools) on the edge of Nairobi and Sabaki River mouth north of Malindi. The last few months have been no exception, with **Honey Buzzard**, **Rufous Bush Chat**, **Irania** and **Wahlberg's Honeybird** at Biodiversity Park and **Sandwich Tern**, **Pomarine Skua** and a high count of **Broad-billed Sandpipers** at Sabaki.

In an exceptional season's ringing at Ngulia Safari Lodge in Tsavo West National Park over 29,000 migrants were caught and ringed in about five weeks. Noteworthy species ringed including **Great Spotted Cuckoo**, **Eurasian Scops Owl**, **Redstart**, **Wood Warbler** and **Red-naped Bush Shrike**. Still other records of interest are the **Imperial Eagle** at Mariakani (17th record for Kenya if it is accepted), **Corncrake** in Tsavo West (an under-recorded species due to its secretive behaviour) and **Little Tawny Pipit** in Nairobi National Park (again pending acceptance by the Rarities Committee).

Amur Falcon
— Martin Woodcock

Breeding Records

Black-headed Heron: (conf 49D) 17 nests in mixed heronry, Alphega Sisal Factory, Mogotio, 8/95, PM

Cattle Egret: (conf 49D) 110 active nests in mixed heronry, Alphega Sisal Factory, Mogotio, 8/95, PM

Marabou Stork: 1 fledgling in nest, Hippo Pools, Nairobi NP, 8/10/95, WBW

Great Sparrowhawk: 3 young fledged from nest, Upper Hill, Nairobi, 3–10/95, FN

African Goshawk: (conf 102B) Gede Forest Station, Arabuko Sokoke Forest, 8–10/95, DN

Lizard Buzzard: (conf 102B) Mida Village, Watamu, 3/95, & 1 young fledged, Gede Forest Station, Arabuko Sokoke Forest, 2–5/95 DN

Crowned Eagle: incubating, Nairobi NP, 8/95, TS

Black Crake: 2 young in nest, fisherman's Camp, Naivasha, 16/10/95, KM

Black-headed Plover: 2 nests (Jan) — 1 robbed by children; 3 nests (Aug) all at Kampi ya Samaki, 1995, JC

Heuglin's Courser: 2 nests (Jan), 4 nests (Aug) all around Kampi ya Samaki, Baringo, 1995, JC

Collared Pratincole: (pres, prob 15D) newly fledged juv shot by gamebird hunting party, Gamurra, Kalacha, 12/7/95, AS

Emerald-spotted Wood Dove: (conf 101A) nest with 2 eggs, Ngulia Safari Lodge, Tsavo West NP, 15/12/95, CJ

Tambourine Dove: (conf 102B) chick fed by adult in nest, Mida Village, Watamu, 10/9/95, DN

Emerald Cuckoo: juv fed by Black-headed Oriole, Crescent Island, Naivasha, 16/8/95, ML

Klaas' Cuckoo: juv fed by Paradise Flycatcher pair, Upper Hill, Nairobi, 24/6/95, FN

Red-chested Cuckoo: (conf 50A) chick in Spotted Morning Thrush nest, Kampi ya Samaki, Baringo, 14/8/95, JC

Sokoke Scops Owl: 2 juvs with adults, Arabuko Sokoke Forest, 1–5/95, DN

Montane Nightjar: nest with 2 chicks, Biodiversity Park, Nairobi, 5/11/95, CJ, PN

Narina's Trogon: (conf 74C) recent fledgling in woodland beyond Sand River, Maasai Mara, 9/12/95, YM-C

African Hoopoe: 6 eggs in nest, Kampi ya Samaki, 23/8/95, JC; ad carrying food, Naivasha, 16/10/95, KM

White-headed Wood Hoopoe: (conf 62C) pair carrying food & young calling from nest, Crater Lake Game Sanctuary, Naivasha, 7/10/95, JW

Mountain Illadopsis: (pres, prob 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 25/10–3/11/95 EW, PGG, TI

Yellow-whiskered Greenbul: (prob 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 25/10–3/11/95 EW, PGG, TI

Placid Greenbul: (post pres, prob 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 25/10–3/11/95 EW, PGG, TI

Eastern Bearded Scrub Robin: 3 chicks in nest, *Cynometra* forest, Mida, Arabuko Sokoke Forest, 3–4/95, DN

East Coast Akalat: juv being fed by adult, *Afzelia* forest, Mida, Arabuko Sokoke Forest, 7/5/95, DN

White-starred Forest Robin: (post pres, prob 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 25/10–3/11/95 EW, PGG, TI

Yellow-bellied Eremomela: (conf 50A) 2 nests both with 2 eggs, Kampi ya Samaki, Baringo, 8/95, JC

Tacazze Sunbird: nest on Cypress tree near houses, Njabini town, S. Kinangop, 11/7/95, SMK

Northern Double-collared Sunbird: (post pres, prob 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 25/10–3/11/95 EW, PGG, TI

Olive Sunbird: (pres, prob 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 25/10–3/11/95 EW, PGG, TI

White-browed Sparrow Weaver: nesting at Ofafa Jericho School, Nairobi, 24/8/95, BK

Bronze Mannikin: (conf 50A) nest with 3 eggs, Kampi ya Samaki, Baringo, 20/8/95, JC; juv found on ground, Gede Forest Station, Arabuko Sokoke Forest, 29/5/95, DN

Silverbill: (conf 50A) young being fed, Kampi ya Samaki, Baringo, 4/1/95, JC

Other records: Afrotropical species

Little Grebe: 30 at Kenyatta University Sewage Treatment Plant, 27/9/95, WMBW

Darter: (pres 39C) Matthew's Range, 30–31/7/83, PR; 2 at Mzima Springs, Tsavo West NP 21/10/95, LL

Shoebill: (pres 75B) probably the same individual that was first seen in Masaai Mara & then Amboseli was seen at Hyena Dam, Nairobi NP on 14/10 and 27/11/95, K & JW

Little Bittern: 1 adult Nairobi NP, 3/9/95 Luc, TB, TP, EVB, GB

Grey Heron: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Black-headed Heron: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Madagascar Squacco Heron: 1 Nairobi NP, 3/9/95 Luc, TB, TP, EVB, GB

Squacco Heron: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Green-Backed Heron: (pres 39C) Matthew's Range, 30-31/7/83, PR

Night Heron: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Hamerkop: (pres 39C) Matthew's Range, 30–31/7/83, PR

Marabou: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Yellow-billed Stork: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Hadada: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Sacred Ibis: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Fulvous Whistling Duck: (post pres 91B) Lamu, 21/8/83, PR

Egyptian Goose: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Southern Pochard: (post pres 91B) Lamu, 21/8/83, PR

Red-billed Teal: (post pres 91B) Lamu, 21/8/83, PR

Secretary Bird: (pres 26D) South Horr, 29/7/83, PR

Shikra: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Tawny Eagle: (post pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

African Hawk Eagle: (post pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Lizard Buzzard: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Gabar Goshawk: (pres 103A) Malindi, 20/8/83, PR; (pres 91B) Lamu, 21/8/83, PR

Dark Chanting Goshawk: (pres 26D) South Horr, 29/7/83, PR

Bat Hawk: The Ark, Aberdares, 17/6/95, IH

Grey Crowned Crane: c. 100 at Kenyatta University Sewage Treatment Plant, 27/9/95, WMBW

African Finfoot: One female at confluence of Chania and Thika Rivers near Blue Posts Hotel, 1/5/95, LD & EVB, 'appeared to have been resting on the bank at the tip of the peninsula as we approached... she scuttled along the surface of the water for some 75 to 100 m'.

Painted Snipe: (post pres 91B) Lamu, 21/8/83, PR

Crab Plover: 644 at Mida Creek, 19/12/95, Luc, KC, LB

Buff-spotted Pygmy Crake: (pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 25/10–3/11/95 EW, PGG, TM

Bronze-naped Pigeon: (pres 49D) Chemorogok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 13–15/10/95, LAB, EW, PGG

Red-fronted Parrot: (post pres 49D) Chemorogok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 13–15/10/95, LAB, EW, PGG

Klaas' Cuckoo: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Spotted Eagle Owl: (pres 74C) Cottar's Camp, Masaai Mara, 1–3/4/93, NW

African Wood Owl: (pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 25/10–3/11/95 EW, PGG, TM

African Scops Owl: (post pres 50A) Baringo, 2/8/83, PR; (post pres 48B) Lokitela Farm (near Kitale), 7/10/95, PH

Narina's Trogon: (post 49D) Chemorogok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 13–15/10/95, LAB, EW, PGG

Bar-tailed Trogon: (pres 49D) Chemorogok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 13–15/10/95, LAB, EW, PGG

Pied Kingfisher: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Brown-hooded Kingfisher: (post pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Woodland Kingfisher: (pres 39C) Matthew's Range, 30–31/7/83, PR — this follows the pattern of a recent easterly range extension for this species: see *Bird Atlas of Kenya*, p. 262.

Pygmy Kingfisher: regularly at bird bath in dry period, Upper Hill, Nairobi, 10/95

FN; 1 ringed NMK 26/7/95 then re-trapped NMK 30/9/95 & again with second (new) bird on 14/10/95; 1 seen same site 19/10/95, NbiRG.

White-throated Bee-eater: (pres 26B) c. 40 km N of Loyangalani, Turkana, 22–28/7/83, PR

Little Bee-eater: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Rufous-crowned Roller: (pres 91B) Manda Island, Lamu, 22/8/83, PR

Broad-billed Roller: (post pres 49D) Chemorogok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 13–15/10/95, LAB, EW, PGG

Grey-throated Barbet: (pres 49D) Chemorogok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 13–15/10/95, LAB, EW, PGG

Yellow-billed Barbet: (post pres 49D) Chemorogok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 13–15/10/95, LAB, EW, PGG

Wahlberg's Honeybird: 1 singing Biodiversity Park, Nairobi, 11/10/95, CJ

Red-breasted Wryneck: 1 NMK, 4/11/95, PN & CJ

Mombasa Woodpecker ***Campethera mombassica*****:** (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW (= Golden-tailed Woodpecker)

Nubian Woodpecker: Upper Hill, Nairobi, 29/8/95, YM-C

Fine-banded Woodpecker: (pres 48B) Lokitela Farm (near Kitale), 7/10/95, PH

African Broadbill: (pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 25/10–3/11/95, EW, PGG, TM

Pink-breasted Lark: (post pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Banded Martin: Kenyatta University Sewage Treatment Plant, 27/9/95, WMBW

African Sand Martin: (pres 39C) Kitich Camp, Matthew's Range, 9/95, FT et al.

African Hill Babbler: (post pres 49D) Chemorogok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 13–15/10/95, LAB, EW, PGG

Purple-throated Cuckoo Shrike: (post pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 13–15/10/95, LAB, EW, PGG

Mountain Greenbul: (post prob 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 13–15/10/95, LAB, EW, PGG

Nicator: (post pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW; Pagasi River, Ngurumans, 30/12/95, YM-C, PLP

Northern Brownbul: (pres 39C) Matthew's Range, 30–31/7/83; (pres 26B) c. 40 km N of Loyangalani, Turkana, 22–28/7/83, PR

Montane Oriole: (pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 25/10–3/11/95 EW, PGG, TM

Rüppell's Robin Chat: (pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 25/10–3/11/95 EW, PGG, TM

Red-capped Robin Chat: (pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 25/10–3/11/95 EW, PGG, TM

Abyssinian Ground Thrush: (post pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 25/10–3/11/95 EW, PGG, TM

Red-capped Robin Chat: (post pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW; a presumed migrant of this species was caught and ringed at Ngulia, 19/11/95, NRG

Grey-winged Ground Robin: (pres 48B) Lokitela Farm (near Kitale), 7/10/95, PH

White-Starred Forest Robin: (post pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 13–15/10/95, LAB, EW, PGG

Northen Olive Thrush: (post pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 13–15/10/95, LAB, EW, PGG

Grey Apalis: (pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 13–15/10/95, LAB, EW, PGG

Black-throated Apalis: (pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 13–15/10/95, LAB, EW, PGG

Black-collared Apalis: (pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 25/10–3/11/95 EW, PGG, TM

Grey-capped Warbler: (pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 25/10–3/11/95 EW, PGG, TM

Evergreen Forest Warbler: (pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 13–15/10/95, LAB, EW, PGG

Cinnamon Bracken Warbler: (pres 51C) Timau, 10/8/83, PR; (pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 13–15/10/95, LAB, EW, PGG

Yellow Warbler: (pres 48B) Lokitela Farm (near Kitale), 7/10/95, PH

Mountain Yellow Warbler: (pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 13–15/10/95, LAB, EW, PGG

Siffling Cisticola: (post pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Rattling Cisticola: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Tiny Cisticola: (pres 51C) Timau, 10/8/83, PR

Brown Parisoma: (pres 48B) Lokitela Farm (near Kitale), 7/10/95, PH

Pale Flycatcher: (pres 48B) Lokitela Farm (near Kitale), 7/10/95, PH

Little Tawny Pipit: 1 Nairobi NP, 4/1/96, KC, LB — record yet to be accepted by Rarities Sub-committee

Mountain Wagtail: (pres 39C) Matthew's Mts, 30–31/7/83, PR

Tropical Boubou: (pres 39C) Matthew's Mts, 30–31/7/83, PR

Red-naped Bush Shrike: An immature bird of this seldom recorded species was found dead on the radiator of a car, having struck the vehicle somewhere between Mombasa and Malindi, 31/8/95, IR; 1 immature ringed Ngulia, Tsavo West NP, 18/11/95, NRG

Doherty's Bush Shrike: (pres 48B) Lokitela Farm (near Kitale), 7/10/95, PH

Sulphur-breasted Bush Shrike: (pres 39C) Kitich Camp, Matthew's Range, 20/10/95, PH

Brubru: (pres 39C) Kitich Camp, Matthew's Range, 9/95, FT et al.

Abbot's Starling: "Crippling views" of 2 birds, Gatamayu Forest, 26/12/95, Luc, KC, LB

Collared Sunbird: (pres 39C) Matthew's Mts, 30–31/7/83, PR

Mariqua Sunbird: (pres 48B) Lokitela Farm (near Kitale), 7/10/95, PH

Northern Double-collared Sunbird: (pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 13–15/10/95, LAB, EW, PGG

Beautiful Sunbird: 2 birds including a male in immature plumage, Upper Hill, Nairobi, 9/9/95, YM-C

Abyssinian White-eye: (pres 114B) Pwani ya Kombani, Tiwi, 24/8/95 KRB

Grosbeak Weaver: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Masked Weaver: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Golden-backed Weaver: (pres 101B) Russel's Camp, Tsavo East, 2–5/1/92, NW

Golden Weaver: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Brown-capped Weaver: (post pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 25/10–3/11/95 EW, PGG, TM

Somali Sparrow: (post pres 26D) Turkana, 28/7/83, PR

Black-crowned Waxbill: (pres, prob 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 13–15/10/95, LAB, EW, PGG

Red-billed Firefinch: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Red-headed Bluebill: (pres 48B) Lokitela Farm (near Kitale), 7/10/95, PH; (pres 49D) Chemogorok Forest, Eldama Ravine, 25/10–3/11/95 EW, PGG, TM

Bronze Mannikin: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Yellow-rumped Seed-eater: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Yellow-fronted Canary: (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Other records: Palaearctic species

Teal: A male in badly worn plumage was among c. 700 Shoveler, Dandora sewage Ponds, 3/1/96, AWC

Garganey: An early record at Kenyatta University Sewage Treatment Plant, 27/9/95, WMBw

Tufted Duck: 1 seen among several 1000 other Palaearctic duck at the Dandora Sewage Ponds, 3/1/96, AWC

Honey Buzzard: 1 overflying Biodiversity Park, 9/12/95 FN and other observers.

Imperial Eagle: (pres 102D) adult bird at Mariakani, 19/11/95, Luc, JaW — record yet to be accepted by Rarities Committee

Booted Eagle: 1 at Biodiversity Park, Nairobi, 1/11/95, WMW, pale phase bird, Nairobi NP, 3/12/95, CJ; 2 (1 pale, 1 dark phase) Ngulia, 15/12/95, NRG; 1 over Bwatherangi Campsite, Meru NP, 1/1/96, CJ

Amur Falcon: up to 50, Solio Ranch, Laikipia, beginning Dec 1995, KB; 2 ad males N. Kinangop, 1/12/95, Luc et al.; 1 Nairobi NP, 30/11/95, SK & KM.

Eleonora's Falcon: 2 moving south on 2/11/95 and 1 on 3/11/95, Kinangop, CJ, PN

Lesser Kestrel: up to 30, Solio Ranch, Laikipia, beginning Dec 1995, KB

Corncrake: 1 in marshy area near Ngulia, Tsavo West NP, 16/12/95, Luc, VH, KC, LB, JK

Whimbrel: 1 Dandora Sewage Ponds, Nairobi, 14/10/95, CJ — the second record of this species for Nairobi area

Green Sandpiper: 1 Biodiversity Park, Nairobi, 20/8/95 and 1/11/95, FN; (pres 102C) Mariakani, 16–20/11/95, Luc, JaW

Temminck's Stint: (pres 91B) Lamu, 21/8/83, PR; 1 on lake shore by Lake Baringo Club, 1/1/96, Luc, VH, KC, LB

Broad-billed Sandpiper: 38 counted Sabaki River mouth, 8/12/95, Luc, KC, LB

Bar-tailed Godwit: 3–4 together with Black-tailed Godwits, Sangara Ranch Dam, Laikipia, 4/12/95, KB

Pomarine Skua: 1 at Sabaki River mouth, 18/12/95, Luc, KC, LB

Sooty Tern: 1 seen c. 20 km offshore from Watamu, 20/12/95, Luc, VH, KC, LB

Sandwich Tern: 1 at Sabaki River mouth, 18/12/95, Luc, KC, LB

Great Spotted Cuckoo: 1 Mtito Andei, 16/12/95, OM; 1 ringed late November 1995 and another seen 17/12/95, Ngulia, Tsavo West NP, NRG

Eurasian Scops Owl: 1 ringed Ngulia, Tsavo West NP, 17/11/95, NRG

Eurasian Swift: 1000–1500 moving south with several hundred Eurasian Swallows, a few House Martins, 2 Mottled Swifts and a Scarce Swift, N. Kinangop, 29/9/95, CJ; at Biodiversity Park, Nairobi, 1/11/95, WMBw

Eurasian Bee-eater: 15 birds, N. Kinangop, 8/9/95, JW

Sand Martin: "100s", Loldia Ranch, Naivasha, 16/9/95, JW

Golden Oriole: 1 adult male together with 7 immatures or females, Loldia Ranch, Naivasha, 22/10/95, JW

Rufous Bush Chat: 1 at Biodiversity Park, Nairobi, 8/10/95, Luc & WBW

Irania: ad male at Biodiversity Park, Nairobi, 29/11/95, WMBw

Nightingale (ssp. *africana*): Upper Hill, Nairobi, 20/10/95, FN

Rock Thrush: 1 with Northern Wheatear, south of Ngong Hills, 1/10/95, CJ

Northern Wheatear: Biodiversity Park, Nairobi, 17/10/95 and 1/11/95, FN & WMBw

Redstart: a single male caught and ringed at Ngulia, Tsavo West NP, 25/12/95, NRG

Great Reed Warbler: 1 singing at Limuru sewage pond, 25/12/95, Luc, KC, LB

Icterine Warbler: (pres 74C) Cottar's Camp, Masaai Mara, 1–3/4/93, NW

Olive-tree Warbler: Siana Springs, Maasai Mara, 30/12/95, Luc, VH, KC, LB

Wood Warbler: a single bird of this rare species was ringed on 25/12/95, Ngulia, Tsavo West NP, NRG

Whitethroat: Carnivore Biodiversity Park, Nairobi, 17/10/95, FN

Spotted Flycatcher: first seen 12/9/95, Loldia Ranch, Naivasha, 12/9/95, JW

White Wagtail: 3 together, Lake Baringo Club, 01/01/96, Luc, VH, KC, LB

Grey Wagtail: 1 on Nairobi River, NMK grounds 19/10/95 & 28/12/95, CJ

Yellow Wagtail: first on 10/10/95, Arroket Estate, Sotik, I & PF

Red-backed Shrike: ad male in pristine plumage, Biodiversity Park, 1/11/95, WMBw — rare on southward passage in Nairobi.

Lesser Grey Shrike: one at Biodiversity Park, 1/11/95, WMBw — rare on southward passage in Nairobi.

Contributors

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Broad-billed Roller breeding at Diani

On 9 October 1995 I was asked to assist with the identification of a bird seen by a long-time resident of Tibei, who lives about 5 km south of our home. I did not see the bird myself. The description was: medium size, uniformly brownish above, bluish-green below, with a conspicuous whitish beak. It was eventually and unequivocally identified as a Broad-billed Roller, the plumage of which was apparently similar to the illustration of an immature shown in Birds of Africa (plate 20, p.321), though this is of the nominate race.

On 1 November 1995 one of our domestic staff brought in a young bird which he had picked up from a grassy/shrubby area under coconut palm trees about 2 km east of here. It was without any doubt a fledgling Broad-billed Roller (above brownish cinnamon, greater wing coverts and greater primary coverts dark blue, throat brownish, breast and belly brownish but retaining a hint of greenish blue, bill very pale yellow (perhaps easily seen as whitish at any distance)). This bird was almost, but not quite, fully fledged. Though unhurt, it was only able to flutter very short distances and I assume it had had the misfortune to fall out of the nest a few days short of its first flight.

The Bird Atlas of Kenya indicates confirmed breeding in the Shimoni QDS (114 C) but only presence in our square (114 B). In Birds of Africa, laying dates for Region D are given as Sept–Nov. These would certainly fit for the fledgling examined on 1 November, and also for the immature seen on 9 October. —*Ken Bock, P O Box 641, Ukunda.*

Purple-throated Cuckoo-shrike

On 24 June 1995, a warm, sunny, Saturday morning in Nandi Hills, I noticed a bird fluttering around in the top branches of the *Acacia* hanging over the upstairs verandah of our house. I thought at first it was a starling but it wasn't big enough and then I noticed it had gape wattles, which were red. Shortly afterwards it was joined by another bird, which looked remarkably like the female of the Black Cuckoo Shrike, which we had seen before. That was the clue which helped and after going through Williams, *Birds of East Africa*, and finally *Birds of Africa* (Vol. IV), I found a beautiful illustration of the birds except that the female definitely had more barring on her belly than the birds in the illustration. The illustration of the immature bird was exactly like the bird we saw. The two of them fluttered around the tree for a while and flew off.

I excitedly told my husband all about finding a 'new bird' for me. He was disappointed to have missed them. Later that afternoon I was working at my desk in the upstairs office and was delighted to see them back again.

This time the male seemed to be playing around. It seemed to jump on a branch and then fall off it. I laughed at his antics, and then the female came and inspected the same fork in the upper branches about a foot from the top of the canopy. I called my husband to see them before they flew off again. My husband then saw them flying around the Cape Chestnut trees calling to each other with a very distinctive gentle *ss-ss* type whistle. We had to go into Eldoret the next day and missed watching them in the clear morning light but the calls were noticeable.

The following Wednesday we were leaving to go to Nairobi when my husband called me back upstairs and showed me that the birds were again around in the same branches. On Friday we returned to see that they had definitely started building a nest. A great deal of surmising then went on: because the illustration in the book shows an "immature female", were they perhaps practising like the flamingos do at Nakuru before nesting properly? The nest was quite remarkable, made of beautiful neat knitted rows of lichen and so cleverly constructed it looked just like the branch of the tree to which it was anchored. Not much of anything except bird-watching happened that Saturday. The female did all the nest building with the male never very far away and they called to each other as she came towards the nest.

The next day we were away but on the following Monday, 3 July, I wrote in my diary "Saw the male but not the female. Think they've left." On 9 July though I was excited to see her sitting, or nearby just looking at the nest.

I was away until Friday the next week, but my husband reported seeing her on the nest and around. She's a very spasmodic sitter and seems to be away for up to ten minutes at a time. Whilst she's gone the male sits nearby and chases away any other bird that comes anywhere near. She never left if it was raining. Perhaps the fact that they nest so near the top of the tree is to use the warm sunlight to keep the eggs warm whilst she's away. I never saw him sit on the eggs: she did all the incubation.

While the female was on the nest her camouflage was incredible. Seeing them flying around she always seemed conspicuous, but on the nest she came into her own. The barring on her body matched the barring weave of the nest and the gold-green on her wings looked like light on leaves. She was difficult to see and had we not known where to find her we would have missed her altogether. We took a great many photographs of them both at this stage, early in the morning as that was when the sun was on them. The photos of the male are disappointing — his red gape wattles had gone altogether. On 21 July I wrote again in my diary:- "The female cuckoo shrike is still on the nest even in the hot sun. Periods away from the nest seem to be getting shorter."

The following day I noted, "This morning she was away for only 3 minutes and on returning gave a loud call, the loudest whistle I have ever heard her make.

The male appeared as soon as she called; he was in the nearby Jacaranda. It was as if she was clocking on again. In the same tree that morning I had seen African Citrils, Blue Flycatchers, Chin-spot Batis, Grey-headed Sparrows, Black Flycatchers, Bronze Sunbirds and Northern Double-collared Sunbirds — most of which had been drawn to my attention by the male cuckoo-shrike driving them away.

The following week went on in much the same way as the previous week except on Sunday 30 July. That afternoon it was terribly hot, and at five o'clock it got very dark and we had a tremendous hail storm — so bad that the hail was hanging around the next morning, when it looked like Europe in winter. We lost thousands of kilos of the tea crop that day. I was worried about the bird with so little cover from the top of the tree. I went up to the room and watched her through the window. She had flattened herself over the nest and rode out the storm that way. Amazing, even though the tree was rocking with the force of the high winds which accompanied the storm and which uprooted other trees.

On 1 August some sparrows made noisy investigations of the nest while she was away, with no reaction from the male. I wondered what had happened. The following day I saw the male visit the nest, looking down inside with his head on one side. The chicks had hatched. I saw them for the first time on 4 August: all that was visible was two pink beaks over the rim of the nest. On Saturday I saw the nestlings again; they were grey, excellently camouflaged against the bark and lichens of the nest. The parents both fed the chicks, but the male not so often as the female.

I can't actually say what the parents brought the chicks, as they were so quick. Feeding was continuous, and during most of the daylight hours, though the parents seemed to take quite a time to find whatever they fed to their young.

On 25 August I noted: "The young are busy stretching their wings, and look too big for the nest". That afternoon we had more hail.

On 26 August, the young left the nest. I saw the male feeding one fledgling and wondered if the female was caring for the other. The little one gave persistent peeping sounds, as noted under 'Voice' in *Birds of Africa.*

I haven't seen either the parents or young birds since the day they flew, but will never forget the experience of being a privileged observer. — *P. A. Scott, P. O Box 22, Nandi Hills.*

The choir-master of Baringo Cliffs

Almost everybody at Lake Baringo knows about birding and none of them can fail to name two types of eagles commonly seen in the area. The one at the cliffs is Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxii.* Other birds try to mob either of the pair of

eagles as it undertakes its routine half-kilometre inspection flight, between the roosting area to the north and the nest to the south. This takes place twice per day, once at about 11.00 a.m. and again at about 3.30 p.m.. Preceding this magnificent glide along the cliffs is a deafening chorus of Rock Hyraxes that seems to say "Now this is the right temperature [about 30–34°C], we are the ones and we are the fittest." The chorus and the small figures from which it emanates both disappear at lightning speed, and the silence of a grave reigns, as the majestic choir-master, whose absence operates the hyrax chorus, noiselessly makes his appearance. A short stop is usual at the roosting area. As the journey resumes, Fan-tailed Ravens lead in the mobbing of the eagle while other birds follow. If the agitation is too much, the low-flying eagle lands on one of the small trees on the cliff. Beneath, a trembling Hyrax sneaks out of its bolt-hole and urgently darts back after monitoring the master's movement. Eventually the mob gives up; away they fly and the eagle proceeds to the nest, where the panicky Rock Kestrel takes its turn at mobbing. The kestrels' nest site is below the gigantic nest of the eagle. Who will breed here, the kestrel or the eagle or both, at the same time or different times? — *George Amutete, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Half-collared Kingfisher *Alcedo semitorquata* at Sable Valley Wildlife Sanctuary

On 1 January 1996 at about 17:15 h, accompanied by my houseguest Jane Hunter, I arrived at the Mkurumuji pumphouse in the Shimba Hills. Immediately we stepped onto the weir-path we saw a medium-sized, very blue kingfisher perched on the waterpipe overhanging the river. We each had Leitz Trinovid 10 x 40 binoculars, and were able to watch the bird for ten minutes or so.

Despite the gloom cast over the weir by the overhanging gallery trees, the brilliant blue plumage shone wonderfully; he was in profile with more front than back showing, and we reeled off aloud the salient features: "Black bill, the black continuing into the eye; red feet; white throat, beige chest, buffy breast and underparts; conspicuous white shoulder patch." Then he was off, downriver, piping loudly. "Never mind," said I to Jane, with excited confidence "he'll come back." And sure enough, he did. More piping, and there he was again on the same perch, this time facing upstream, so that we might study his upper plumage. Every half-minute or so, he bobbed, and this showed to advantage the different blue coloration: a panel of caerulean blue runs down the centre mantle and rump, contrasting markedly with the darker, vibrant ultramarine of the wings and head.

He made another foray, piping continuously on the wing as he flew low and direct along the course of the stream. After settling on the pipe again momentarily, he vanished downstream.

In my excitement, I could think of one possible name only for this apparition: Shining Blue Kingfisher. Having never been in contact with *Alcedo* species in Africa, I wasn't really clued up on what it could possibly be. Of course, once we reached my home and got our noses into the books it became obvious that it was the Half-collared Kingfisher. Curiously, neither Jane nor I had remarked the blue half-collar!

The habitat is ideal — a perennial small stream flowing gently between well-shaded, low banks. The altitude is about 270 m above sea level. Although as the crow flies the site is little more than half a kilometre from my house in Sable Valley Sanctuary, the river and pumphouse lie technically within the Shimba Hills National Reserve. The Mkurumuji is the same river which, further back along its course, has plunged over the Sheldrick Falls.

Following the momentous first sighting, I made almost daily visits to the weir. The bird's behaviour on New Year's Day had indicated (or so I naively thought!) that the perch on the pipe was one of its favoured spots, and I was filled with optimism that it would be a piece of cake to capture it on film with my newly acquired 500 mm lens.

Assuming that as we had seen him in the evening there could be no more propitious time to catch him again, I visited the site from around four in the afternoon to dusk on a virtually daily basis. Apart from one flash of blue and a few piping calls, he avoided me. I was also being chivvied fairly severely by the neighbourhood elephants on my evening returns along the pumphouse track.

Then I altered my tactics. On Friday 19 January, I established myself at the weir at 08:00. At 09:45 I heard with excitement the now-familiar piping from downriver, but this was a different bird — the call was much thinner, weaker. I saw a flash of blue as it passed along the weir. Then to my right came more, continuous piping.

I beheld the bird sitting on a dead branch overhanging the river, 20 m away. The light was poor, and my hands trembled, but I got three shots. No time or chance to set up the contraption of stools and cushions all geared to supporting the telelens for a shot on the waterpipe, it had to be hand-held or nothing!

Now in the glasses, I noted the one feature we had missed on the initial sighting: the clear blue crescentic pectoral patches. Although they give origin to the bird's name, they are in fact not a striking field characteristic, blending with the upper plumage to seem as the wing shoulder, until one looks carefully.

The bird stayed on my stretch of the river for 45 minutes, though never settling on the pipe. (Perhaps the metal gets too hot for his feet, until evening!?)

It is a noisy species. Not only does it pipe continuously on the wing, but settled it also pipes spasmodically. The continual bobbing I did not construe as a result of alarm, but rather of habit. After diving into the stream and (possibly)

obtaining prey, on several occasions it flew (to my surprise) quite high up (10 m) into branches where it stayed for some minutes. Once it flew onto the horizontal branch of a sapling on the bank less than 20 m from me, where it called, bobbed, and studiously monitored the river for prey from a considerably greater height than its usual fishing stations, only a half-metre or so above the water. On this occasion I was able to get better-lit shots both front and back. I noticed particularly then the short, rounded tail which is cocked up energetically at every bob.

From the differing call-tones, I deduce there are at least two birds of the species on this stretch of the river. I have not yet been able to determine whether the home-base is up- or down-stream, though favouring the down- hypothesis. It is not easily possible to patrol the stream-bank as there are no paths, the banks being covered with dense tangles of indigenous bush, augmented with noxious impenetrable *Lantana* thickets. The immediate area also seethes with buffalo and unfriendly Shimba elephant. It seems unlikely that it will be possible to locate a nest-site. From the infrequency of the kingfishers' forays to the weir, I would judge that we are at the outer limit of their beat (I note from the literature that the European Kingfisher can have a beat of 2.8 km of river).

Research indicates that our position here in QDS 114A is about 170 km from the nearest previous Kenya site, the Taita Hills. The Taveta area, which has breeding records, lies 235 km distant across continuous semi-arid, unwatered terrain. I am inclined to believe that the Mkurumuji birds have probably been here for some time, and that they are more likely to be an offshoot from the closer Usambara population (recorded by Moreau) only 130 km distant.

It is exciting to find a rare bird on one's doorstep, but even more so when it is one so beautiful. — *Fiona Alexander, Shimba Valley Game Sanctuary, P O Box 890, Ukunda.*

World Bird Watch at Loldia House, Naivasha — A real bird chase

Our team, flagged off by the House Manager Mr Peter Njoroge, started with the lake. Our group of seven staff members was joined by Mr and Mrs Andrew Seymour, two *wageni* from Britain — being real bird lovers they insisted that they had to participate despite being due to leave for the other part of their holiday. On top of that they contributed the film that we used to take pictures.

We were not very lucky with the lake; we took only a small section and proceeded through our house garden and the woodland around. Our reward was a Verreaux's Eagle Owl in a giant fig tree, and the Pearl-spotted Owlet in an Acacia in broad daylight — evidently waiting for us.

We proceeded to Crater Lake Game Sanctuary, to tick off the Lesser Flamingos. We had visited the place about three days ago and witnessed 400 or more birds sailing in, about a fifth of them immatures. The flamingos were still there, although the Fish Eagles had taken their share — we found three birds mercilessly butchered. The flamingos are not common in this lake. A pair of kingfishers far from the water caused controversy — before we could stop the vehicle and wield our field guides and binoculars, one made off and the other vanished into an Acacia tree hole. Another talking point was the White-headed Wood Hoopoe, usually a highland forest bird, which we also spotted in 1994 at almost the same time of the year. We retired quite tired.

On Sunday we combed Loldia Ranch trying to unearth everything. This is our home so we were confident of finding many birds, especially being lucky enough to have a wide range of habitats — water, woodland, grasslands and the Eburu Crater forests at 2,800 m. But unfortunately we missed many regular birds, including Hartlaub's Turaco, Red-billed and Ground Hornbill, our five species of Cuckoos, Temminck's Courser, Grey Crowned Cranes, rollers, scimitarbills, and wheatears.

Not so elusive was the friendly Ant-eater Chat. There are many of them living next door with the villagers and some of them have been breeding in a pit latrine. We saw two pairs just going in through the pit hole carrying food. If you enter the latrine the birds don't really show any concern. They patiently wait until you are through and then get busy with their work. I'm not sure who really can claim ownership, but let's hope both speces will remain on friendly terms, each mindful of the other's welfare.

Otherwise the event was a success and a thing to remember for many years to come. Already we are preparing ourselves for 1996. The Naivasha area is quite a paradise for bird lovers, especially with its amazing range of habitats. The Loldia list, compiled by Dave Richards, has 483 species and already we have added some more. By the next World Birdwatch we hope to have reached 500. So wish us success. — *James Wainaina, Loldia House, P O Box 199 Naivasha..*

Notes from Kilifi Creek

Greater Frigate Bird *Fregata minor.*

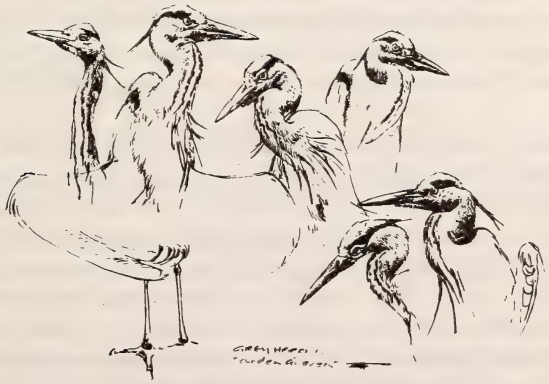
On the evening of 25 May, 1995 at sunset, I sighted a frigate bird soaring over Kilifi Creek (QSD 102D, GPS co-ordinates S 3°37'42", E 39°50'18"), but too far away to identify the species. It settled behind one of the ridges which extend out into the creek. At 6:00 the next morning I began watching for the bird in the direction in which I saw it disappear. My husband joined me at about 6:20. Shortly after 6:30 it appeared in virtually the same place that it had disappeared the night before. It soared directly over our heads and clearly showed the white underside of the female Greater Frigate Bird. It did not remain over the creek, but

headed northeast toward the sea front. We lost sight of it after about 10 to 15 minutes of observation. Some near neighbors (Robert and Doreen Creighton and Gail Utram) report that they have seen frigate birds in the creek at various times in the past.

Little Sparrow Hawk *Accipiter minullus.*
In two consecutive years Little Sparrow Hawks have nested in our back garden in Fumbeni, Kilifi, bordering the creek. The nest was in an old *Erythrina sacleuxii* tree. The first year they raised two chicks to fledgling size in spite of continual harassment by a group of 12 Indian House Crows. Together the male and female managed to keep the crows away. There was a juvenile constantly lingering around the nest while the female was incubating and during the feeding of the young. Though it occasionally showed a great deal of interest in the chicks while they were in the nest, it never appeared to harm them. This juvenile also occasionally intercepted food apparently being brought to the nestlings and fledglings. The fledglings showed a combination of fear and of animosity whenever it came near them, displaying quite dramatically.

The second year the nest was in the same tree, but the male was a young bird still in partly juvenile plumage (speckles on his breast still remaining). This nest, and a subsequent attempt about two weeks later in a different old nest in another *Erythrina* tree about 600 m away, were both destroyed by the crows.

Red-capped Robin Chat *Cossypha natalensis.*
It appears that this species is migratory in Kilifi. In two years of observations it was seen to leave and return on nearly identical days; in 1993 it was last seen on 15 November and first seen again on 10 May, 1994. In 1994 it was last seen on 14 November and again returned on 10 May, 1995. — *Lorna Depew, P O Box 57, Kilifi.*



Grey Herons — ***Bryan Hanlon***

"What *is* that bird?" — Identification and submitting records

Colin Jackson
P O Box 40658, Nairobi

Birding: a pastime that is becoming more and more popular the world over and provides enjoyment and relaxation for people from a vast array of backgrounds, not least here in Kenya. Most birders find enjoyment and satisfaction in identifying birds and making a species list of what they have seen in a day or a particular area — even more so if they turn up a rare or unusual species, possibly even a 'lifer' (birding jargon for a new species for someone's 'Life List'). Lists of species and counts of individual birds also form the foundation of any sort of work related to bird conservation, whether it be for baseline surveys or long-term monitoring of bird distribution and numbers.

Whether watching birds for fun or for scientific research, the central, most important thing is the *correct identification* of the species observed — which is surely one of the challenges to be enjoyed in birding. Of course, if the identification is wrong then the value of the observation is lost, and there is a risk of publishing incorrect and misleading information. So anyone who publishes a record of a bird or a list of records must be 100% certain that the species listed are correct. For this reason any records submitted for publication or circulation (for instance in *Kenya Birds*) are vetted, i.e. checked for likelihood of being correct. Unusual records may be queried, and only those that can be substantiated are accepted.

So what makes a record acceptable? A record becomes 'unusual' if the chance of the species being seen (based on existing knowledge) seems to be small. This can depend on the locality (has it been recorded there before? Is it common/rare in the area?), the time of year (does it normally occur during that season?), the distinctiveness of the bird and the possibility of confusing it with other, very similar, species.

Most records in a list will probably be accepted without question — usually the majority of species listed will be known to occur regularly in that particular area. However there are often one or two records which need more details. This article is concerned with how one goes about giving details of an observation so that your record can be assessed and (with luck) accepted. If you are asked to give more information on a record, don't consider it a slur on your birding ability — it is simply to make extra sure that published information is actually accurate. And even the most expert birders can make mistakes: ticking the wrong box on a checklist produces the same result as misidentification in the field!

Descriptions

A description can range from an outline of one or two characteristic features that clinch the identity of that species, to a full account that includes as much detail as possible of plumage, shape, size, habitat and behaviour. The key thing is that it should, short or long, *describe* the bird! A description that simply says (as many tend to), "I had a very good look at it, at close range" doesn't actually say anything *about* the bird and is no help in deciding whether to accept the record.

Short descriptions

These are normally appropriate for a record that is (a) not completely unexpected, but unusual enough to need confirmation (for instance, a new record for one of the Bird Atlas squares, but in the right season, habitat and overall region), or (b) a species that is easily confused with another, more common one. A classic example of the second case is the Red-billed Firefinch, which is often misidentified as African Firefinch. For a definite African Firefinch, a sufficient description would be a short note by the record saying, "Had black undertail coverts" — this being the salient feature that distinguishes it from the Red-billed.

Full descriptions

A detailed description would be required for a rarity (a species that is very uncommon in a given area or time of year), or for a species that is very difficult to identify. A full description requires as much detailed information on the observation as possible, including details of the site, the conditions the bird was seen under, optical equipment used, etc. — as well as the details of the bird itself. Two examples are given below for Nairobi records, one for a Wahlberg's Honeybird and another for a Whimbrel (not as full as the first but easily sufficient for the record to be accepted).

Wahlberg's Honeybird *Prodotiscus regulus* at Biodiversity Park
Observed by: Luc Lens
Date: 11 October 1995.
Location: Biodiversity Park ('Carnivore'), Langata, Nairobi.
Habitat: Small area of *Acacia* woodland and *Lantana* thicket beside fence of adjoining barracks.
Conditions: Bright sunlight; bird was initially partially backlit and later seen in direct overhead sunlight.
Optical equipment: Optolyth Touring 10x40 binoculars.
Other 'similar' species observed at same time: Brown Parisoma *Parisoma lugens*, Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus*.
Description:
General impression and jizz: A small, fairly drab grey-brown and white bird, quite slim and relatively long-winged; quite active in the middle canopy of an *Acacia* tree feeding

by 'gleaning' and showing a flash of white in the tail when it flicked across from one branch to another.
Size: Small, slightly larger-bodied than Brown Parisoma but noticeably shorter-tailed.
Upperparts: Uniform grey-brown.
Wings: Same general grey-brown as back and mantle.
Underparts: Throat and upper breast grey-brown 'fading' to greyish-white on lower breast; whiter still on belly.
Tail: relatively short (shorter than in Brown Parisoma); colour not seen clearly, but flash of white in the tail seen when bird flew a short distance between branches.
Bill: Fairly small, fine and slightly but clearly decurved, tapering to quite a sharp point.
Other features: The bird was first observed singing — drooping its wings and shaking/trembling its body all over while making a brief, quite high-pitched trill. At the same time, two large white 'fluffs' of feathers were clearly showing each side of the rump/lower back between the drooping wings and the body.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* at Dandora Oxygenation Ponds
Observed by: Ogeto Mwebi, John Kanyonyo
Date: 14 October 1995.
Location: Dandora Oxygenation Ponds, Ruhai, Nairobi.
Habitat: Large, concrete-walled oxygenation pond with c. 45° angled banks.
Conditions: Bright, direct sunlight, partially side-lit (time was approx. 16:30 h)
Optical equipment: Optolyth Touring 10x40 and Opticron 10x40 binoculars; Bushnell Spacemaster telescope with x22 WA eye-piece.
Other 'similar' species observed at same time: Also with the bird at the time were Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* and Avocet *Avocetta recurvirostra*.
Description:
A large, basically medium-brown wader with paler underparts and a relatively long, decurved bill. In size, it was similar in height to the Avocets near it but with a bulkier body. Upperparts were medium-brown with dark centres and pale edges to the feathers; crown had broad, pale central stripe bordered by very dark stripes; below, the breast was boldy streaked darker brown on light brown fading to unstreaked white on belly. Bill was c. twice the length of the head and strongly decurved. Legs long and pale blue-grey.

In writing a description of a bird, it is always best to note down the details *as you are looking at it in the field*, rather than trying to remember what it looked like and writing it down at the end of the day (memory tends to be remarkably unreliable!). It helps to do it systematically and describe everything that you can. Start with the head, work down the back to the rump and tail, describe the wings, the underparts and then the soft parts (bill, eye, eye ring and leg colour and dimensions). Add to it the size of the bird, especially if you can compare it with another bird of known species nearby. Describe its behaviour and calls/song (if any) as accurately as possible (not easy!). Habitat and the bird's position in the habitat is also important — e.g.

high or low in the canopy, in shallow/deep water or on dry mud/open stony ground etc. The 'jizz' of a bird is also often very useful, 'jizz' being the general look of the bird — the way it flies or walks (e.g. fluttery or strong & direct flight) and the way it perches or stands (e.g. upright or crouched). A good field guide will describe any characteristic 'jizz' of a species or at least illustrate it.

Along with a description of a rarity, the record is more likely to be accepted if you include one or more sketches of the bird. Ideally these will be annotated to highlight the features that stood out the most and determined your identification. You don't have to be an artist to produce such a sketch so long as it has the main parts of the bird — a head and a body with wings, tail and legs! An important thing is to try and get the proportions of the bird roughly correct: if the bill is twice as long as the head, draw it as such, or if the legs are short and squat, draw them that way and add a note beside them to highlight the fact. Better still is, of course, a photograph — and one that shows the bird at least relatively close up and in focus is most likely to help the record be accepted! For extreme rarities (e.g. Grey-headed Batis), a photograph will be essential if the record is to be accepted.

Common reasons for identification 'boo-boos'

Many of the mistakes made in identification stem from a few major stumbling blocks. A little extra care and precision and 'looking twice' at a bird can do a lot to iron out the problems.

(a) Assumption: "It's probably..."

This must be the most widespread 'disease' in bird identification (is there any of us who hasn't suffered a touch of it from time to time?). You have a quick look at a bird flying over; it's a black swift with no white rump — "probably a Nyanza Swift..." — but why not an African Black Swift or even a Eurasian Swift? Never assume anything: make sure of what you are identifying.

(b) Unfamiliarity with one's birds

Another common problem is not being familiar with the characteristics that differentiate similar species from each other — particularly the less common ones from the common. What exactly *is* the difference between a Scarlet-chested and a Hunter's Sunbird? The only remedy for this is careful attention and study — and *reading* the field gude rather than just looking at the pictures.

Related to this may be a lack of familiarity with what species to expect or not to expect — which one of the two sunbirds is expected to occur in this area, which would be unusual? Is it really likely that you will see a Fischer's Starling at Nakuru? Fortunately there are two excellent places to find this information: the *Bird Atlas of Kenya* (Lewis & Pomeroy, 1989) or (more easily obtained) *The Birds of East Africa* (Britton et al. 1980).

(c) Lack of attention to habitat, behaviour and distribution

It is too easy to rely on just the pictures in your field guide ("It looks more or less like number three..."), and not bother considering the habitat, behaviour and distribution of a bird to help in identifying it. These are crucial characteristics for a lot of species and help tremendously in their identification, particularly with some groups such as greenbuls and cisticolas. For instance, Hunter's and Singing Cisticolas look superficially similar, but only Hunter's sings in duet.

Immature Steppe Eagle — *Martin Woodcock*

Taking the time to make proper descriptions of unusual bird that you see, and to check identifications carefully in the reference books, is one of the very best ways to improve your birding skills. The effort is well worth it — and when you do come across something rare or unusual, there's a much better chance that you can convince everyone else that is actually what you saw!

Ngulia: Kenya's premier migrant ringing site

Graeme Backhurst
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Early in December 1969 Alec Forbes-Watson and Alex Duff MacKay of the National Museums of Kenya were at the just completed lodge at Ngulia in Tsavo West NP. They were there to advise on the setting up of a small museum in the lodge. By great good fortune, as it turned out, their visit coincided with mist at night.

During their first night the whole lodge was alive with birds and insects. A couple of days later, back in Nairobi, they told me about the amazing phenomenon they had witnessed and I was soon on my way down to Tsavo.

So, purely because of this chance visit, the Ngulia Ringing Project was born. What was happening at Ngulia, in the middle of the Tsavo bush, was that night-migrating birds were being attracted to the bright game-viewing lights of the lodge much as birds used to be attracted to coastal lighthouses. Ngulia has been visited ever year since 1969 by varying numbers of ringers. Although much has been learned about the migration, every season poses new questions.

Mist, moon and lights

The Ngulia phenomenon, in a nutshell, is that birds are attracted to the game lights at night under misty and moonless conditions. This means that there are only a limited number of nights available during each migration to catch birds: the moon is absent or small on about 20 nights but the presence of mist is completely unpredictable. For sure, mist will occur on many nights during the main southward migration period but during some years, when the moon is 'right', the mist isn't: so, short of making our own mist, there's nothing we can do about it. On clear nights, even with no moon, virtually no birds come to the lights. Thus it is a combination of mist and light that attract the birds.

During the northward migration from March to early May the situation is even less predictable. Misty conditions are infrequent and high winds, which make mist netting difficult, are common.

In spite of these constraints, almost 156,000 Palaearctic migrants have been ringed on southward passage in the 26 years (to January 1995). In the early years our visits were just for a few days each season, but in more recent times we have been able provide cover from the end of October through to early January by calling on the relatively large number of people who have been able to take part.

Importance

It is fairly well known that migrating birds come to lights inland in Africa. What makes Ngulia so special is the number of birds involved. This must be because of several factors: the geographical location of Ngulia relative to the long-established migration route; the siting of Ngulia Lodge — on high ground, facing north; and the fact that there are no other lights to compete. In 1969 the lodge lights were mostly 1.5 kW each and these were retained for some years. Our impression is that more birds came down to the lights in those early years. Nowadays the maximum power of the lights is 1 kW, and several are only half this and fewer birds come down. Nevertheless, on nights with large falls of migrants, tens of thousands are brought down and we are only able to catch a small proportion. We often have to reduce the catching at night by taking down nets. Thus, in spite of the reduced numbers of birds, more birds could always be caught with more people and more nets.

The duration of the migration

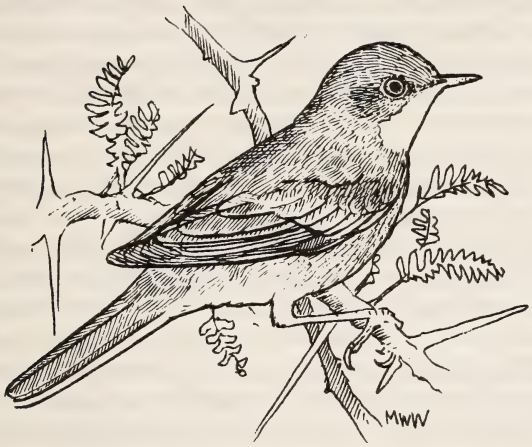
That first visit in 1969 was in early December. Using this as a starting point we have extended our visits either side in subsequent years so that we can now say that the migration begins in the last week of October and extends certainly into early February. However, because misty conditions are very rare in October, we seldom visit Ngulia then because of time constraints. The end of the southward migration seems to vary from year to year. In some years substantial numbers have still been passing at Christmas and even into the first week of January, but in other years there has been little passage by the third week of December. Nevertheless, the migration still continues until at least early February, but with only small numbers involved.

It is important to stress one point: the full story of bird migration at Ngulia will not be known until the site has been covered for a complete year: preferably for more than a year.

The migrants

Forty-nine† species of Palaearctic migrants have been caught and ringed at Ngulia. The vast majority are passerines and of these, three species dominate: the Marsh Warbler (59,567 ringed), Whitethroat (42,417) and Sprosser or Thrush Nightingale (31,430). The fourth most numerous species is one that few birdwatchers will have seen in Africa, the River Warbler (4,695). Other species which are caught in fair numbers are Irania (2,629), Willow Warbler (2,302), Red-backed Shrike (1,411), Basra Reed Warbler (1,195), Red-tailed Shrike (1,045),

†Many more migrant species have been seen at Ngulia but have not been caught and ringed. For example, Ngulia is an excellent site for viewing raptor migration and Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters also pass south in considerable numbers, often together with various small falcons.



Whitethoat — *Martin Woodcock*

Rufous Bush Chat (1,035), Garden Warbler (908), Barred Warbler (882), Nightingale (816), Barn Swallow (726), Olivaceous Warbler (590), Olive-tree Warbler (558), Eurasian Nightjar (471) and Upcher's Warbler (462).

An interesting aspect about the migration is its lateness. Many of the birds involved have left their European or Asian breeding grounds as early as July but don't appear at Ngulia until November. From work done on the Red Sea coast of Sudan by Gerhard Nikolaus and others we know that many of the 'Ngulia species' enter Africa during July to September, so where do they go in the period before reaching Ngulia in November? The answer is that they must be somewhere in Ethiopia. Suitable sites in Sudan and northern Kenya have been investigated but without success. The stopover area in Ethiopia is a prize still to be claimed.

Origin of the birds

The breeding distribution of the species which occur at Ngulia is known from earlier studies — from collectors and observers in the countries of Eurasia. Recoveries of ringed birds provide information on the whereabouts of individual birds. So far there have been 67 recoveries of migrants from the Ngulia ringing. These recoveries cover just nine species with the majority (43) being Marsh Warblers. The Marsh Warbler is one of the few species whose entire breeding population, from the British Isles to 70°E in Russia, passes through eastern Africa, most to winter south of Kenya. Twenty-six of the recoveries have been in the breeding area from France east to Dagestan, 11 in the Arabian area and six to further south in Africa. Those on passage in the Arabian peninsular were all in May (going north) or August (going south) showing the rather precise timing of this species' migration.

Two of the Sprosser recoveries have been to the breeding area: one to Ukraine and the other, caught and released by a ringer at its nest in southeastern Finland near the Russian border. All the other recoveries have been in the Middle East and Saudi Arabia. Before ringing began at Ngulia, the Whitethroat was a species with very few recoveries involving sub-Saharan Africa. Unlike the Marsh Warbler, the passage and winter ranges span the African continent from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean and south to South Africa. Two of the seven Whitethroat recoveries have been to breeding areas in Russia, four on passage in the Middle East and one further south, to Iringa in Tanzania.

As all ringers know only too well, luck plays a tremendous part in recoveries. The first Ngulia-ringed bird to be recovered was a Barred Warbler to Saudi Arabia. It was recovered when only 28 had been ringed; now a further 854 have been ringed, but no more recovered. Recoveries indicating the (minimum) speed of migration are especially subject to the effects of luck. When a bird is ringed, will it immediately resume its migration? When it alights after a migratory flight, will it be caught immediately? Luck was on our side when we ringed a Marsh Warbler at the end of November 1975, for it was killed by boys in Malawi, 1480 km south just five days later. Ringers at the long-established Chokpak Pass ringing station in southern Kazakhstan caught 500 Eurasian Nightjars as they were passing north in May this year and one of them had been ringed at Ngulia in November 1993. It was only the second recovery of this species involving Africa.

Afrotropical birds at Ngulia

Ngulia is a great place for birds besides the Palaearctic migrants. Strangely, though, very few seem to be migrating, or at least moving at night. In some years good numbers of Harlequin Quail have been caught at night, but in other years the species is scarce. The same goes for Afrotropical nightjars of which 543 individuals of five species have been ringed, yet in some recent years less than ten have been ringed. It could be that more Afrotropical migrants would be encountered at other times of the year when no ringers have ever been at Ngulia and that's another mystery to be unravelled in the future.

Other Ngulias

There must be many other isolated brightly lit sites in Africa which attract night migrants. Maybe none will be as good as Ngulia but they are surely worth investigating, especially under no-moon misty or wet conditions. It is also worth remembering one amazing case of a bird coming to lights: the Audubon's Shearwater that John Williams found under the Limuru TV mast northwest of Nairobi in October 1963. Ngulia can't match that!

Participation

The Ngulia Ringing Group welcomes participants. Although the often very busy activities make it not really a suitable training area for really novice ringers, there are nevertheless many invaluable things a non-ringer can do as part of the team. During slack times after clear nights beginners can get training — the only problem is if there are no clear nights.

In a good season the most important ingredient is perhaps stamina! Catching and ringing can start as early as 21:00 and carry on unbroken until the next afternoon! Most birds are caught in mist nets set at night just north of the lodge. At first light, after taking down the night nets, other nets are opened in daytime sites in the bush. At night, birds are ringed under cover inside the lodge, while the day catch is usually processed by the swimming pool which is also a good place to watch raptor migration!

Anyone interested in taking part at Ngulia is urged to contact me (tel. Nairobi 891419, evenings or weekends) for details. We've had people visit from all over the world and without exception all have had a thoroughly enjoyable time, even those who have spent rather too much time sitting watching the stars praying, without success, for the mist to come in.

Aknowledgements

In conclusion, I must mention the encouragement and help we have received from the Kenya Wildlife Service and African Tours & Hotels Limited over the years. It has been invaluable.

Migrant birds at Ngulia

David Pearson
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The species

Over 98% of the birds attracted to the Ngulia lights are Palaearctic passerines, some 28 species of which are caught every year. Three in particular dominate the catches, and account for over 80% of most daily ringing totals: Marsh Warbler, Whitethroat and Sprosser. Among the 'minor' species, the commonest are River Warbler, Irania, Willow Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Red-backed and Red-tailed Shrikes, Rufous Bush Chat and Basra Reed Warbler, all of which are caught in tens per day at times, while Nightingale, Garden Warbler, Barred Warbler and the three grey *Hippolais* species, Olive-tree, Upcher's and Olivaceous, are ringed regularly in smaller numbers, along with a few migrant wheatears and Rock Thrushes.

Some interesting non-passerines also occur. Nightjars are regularly present at the lights and are often ringed, and scores may be seen together on good nights. Six Afrotropical species can occur, but these are often easily outnumbered by the Eurasian species. Eurasian Rollers are regular at night, sometimes in groups or even scores together, and are frequently caught. Little Bitterns, Corncrakes, Eurasian and Lesser Cuckoos and Eurasian Scops Owls occasionally provide extra Palaearctic variety, usually on nights with heavy rain. The only Afrotropical species attracted regularly to the lights is the Harlequin Quail, whose daily numbers vary from one or two up to scores. Other frequent African night arrivals include Plain, Dusky and Donaldson-Smith's Nightjars, Black-and-white Cuckoo and Grey-headed Kingfisher, and unexpected visitors have included Lesser Moorhen, African Crake and Little Grebe.

Red-tailed Shrike — *Martin Woodcock*

The migration at Ngulia is part of a heavy November–December passage through southeast Kenya, east of Mts Kenya and Kilimanjaro. The species composition here is very different from that of the major passage through Uganda to the west. Nearly all the Marsh Warblers, River Warblers, Sprossers and Olive-tree Warblers bound for southern Africa use the narrow southeast Kenyan corridor on which Ngulia is centrally placed; these are all rare or unrecorded in Uganda. On the other hand, species such as Reed, Great Reed and Sedge Warblers are surprisingly scarce at Ngulia, but pass in large further west. Red-backed Shrikes, Garden Warblers and Willow Warblers dominate Uganda movements, but are no more than minor species in Tsavo.

Migration timing

The timing and composition of Ngulia migration is surprisingly predictable from year to year, and from one stage of the season to another. It is clearly not much

influenced by local conditions and is perhaps largely governed by the birds' internal physiological cycles. If nights are misty the first birds appear at the lodge at the end of October, and numbers increase quickly during the first two weeks of November, even though surrounding park areas are usually still dry. Peak numbers are expected from about 15 November to 10 December. There is then a marked decline about the third week of December, but small arrivals usually continue to early January. Early falls in late October and early November involve a high percentage of Spotted Flycatchers and Rufous Bush Chats, and most of the shrikes, Eurasian Nightjars. Nightingales and Olive-tree Warblers appear during a short four-week period in November. On the other hand, Marsh Warbler and River Warbler numbers pick up only from about mid-November. The variety of Palaearctic species is greatest about mid-November, and decidedly less in December. Some species have a more protracted passage. For example, Whitethroasts, Barred Warblers and Iranias are likely from early November through to January. Each species, however, has its own fairly predictable favourite passage time. We have found that, overall, first year birds tend to outnumber adults at Ngulia by about two to one. In most species, the median passage date for young birds is one to two weeks later than that for adults.

Passage at Ngulia peaks for most species about 10–12 weeks after migration across Arabia and the Red Sea and entry into northeast Africa, which takes place during late August and September. This highlights the importance of northeast Africa, and Ethiopia in particular, as a stopover area for migrants during September and October. The southward journey to southern Africa tends therefore to be split into two stages, a late summer stopover in Ethiopia followed by early autumn migration through Kenya to Tanzania and the southern tropics.

Moult and fat levels

Records of wing moult at Ngulia have given us much interesting insight. There are several species, like Marsh Warbler, Garden Warbler and our eastern Whitethroats in which adults still have their old flight feathers. There are others, by contrast, like Sprosser and Irania, in which adults have moulted fully in their breeding area. The Barred Warbler shows an intermediate situation. It moults its primaries in the Palearctic, but leaves its secondaries until winter. Most adult Barred Warblers at Ngulia in November have a panel of contrasting old secondaries in each wing. We have also found another strategy. Most Basra Reed Warblers, and some of the Whitethroats, Olivaceous Warblers and Sedge Warblers that appear at the lodge have very fresh plumage, including new blackish looking flight feathers. These have clearly moulted only a few weeks previously, presumably in Ethiopia. Adult River Warblers always seem to show a panel of new outer primaries at Ngulia, and they clearly have a partial moult in Ethiopia to

tide them over the autumn period before their full moult in southern Africa. So, observations at Ngulia have added to our information on the use of the autumn stopover period for moult.

Weights and visible fat categories have been noted routinely in Ngulia migrants. Most birds that are grounded carry only small fat loads, and are evidently on flights for destinations not far to the south. However, some 20% or so (higher in some species and on some nights) carry fat loads of 20–50% above 'normal' lean body weight, which would be sufficient to fuel onward journeys of hundreds of kilometres. Whether these are birds which would have migrated on by day, or whether they would have landed at dawn and sat quietly before continuing migration the next night, we can only speculate. Weights and visible fat loads have often been noticeably higher on nights with heavy rain rather than the usual mist and light showers. This suggests that the fatter birds migrating overhead tend to resist the attraction of the lights unless caught in bad weather.

Origins and ringing recoveries

Of our Ngulia birds, Marsh Warblers, River Warblers, Sprossers and Barred Warblers come partly from breeding areas in western and central Europe. All other species reach us from eastern Europe and/or Asia only, and the chances of recovering them are therefore lower. The 144,958 Palaearctic birds ringed so far have given 41 recoveries from Europe, Russia and the Middle East, and five from southern Africa. Over half of these are of Marsh Warblers, including birds west to France, Belgium and Germany, and north to Leningrad. There have also been a number of Sprosser recoveries, from northern and eastern Europe and the Middle East, and of Whitethroats, all to the northeast in Russia and the Arabian area. In addition we have had 13 controls (birds caught with rings, examined and then released) of Marsh Warblers carrying rings from European countries, and one from Oman. The Marsh Warbler recovery pattern conforms with a loop migration through the Middle East, with most August-September birds from western and central Saudi Arabia and April-May birds from further east, in Oman.

If you find a ringed bird...

...send the information to the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi. Record the ring number, the bird species (if known), exactly where and how it was found, and your own name and contact address. If the bird is dead, remove the ring if possible, flatten it out and sellotape it to a piece of paper, then send it with your letter. (Do not try to remove a ring from a live bird — you will probably do a lot of damage.) Once the records have been traced you will be informed where and when the bird was first ringed.

Name games: changes in the new Kenya checklist

Leon Bennun
Box 40658, Nairobi

It is now more than fifteen years since the Ornithological Sub-committee, in the form of Peter Britton and his colleagues, produced *Birds of East Africa*. As well as summarising our knowledge of bird distribution and status, this gave us a standard list of English and scientific names to work with. Now a new list, the product of much deliberation and discussion, is about to appear. In all probability this will provide the new standard for the next decade or so. There are quite a few changes; in Kenya 24 species have dropped out and some 53 new ones been added, giving a total for the country of 1,081 species. And some of the English names are going to look quite unfamiliar.

In my experience, birdwatchers are by and large a tolerant and easy-going lot. However, there are a few things that tend to make them uncharacteristically irritable. Woodpeckers that insist on climbing up the wrong side of the tree-trunk are annoying. Cuckoos that call away fit to burst, but remain obstinately invisible, are a wind-up. But far, far worse is people *messing about with bird names*.

It's one thing after another. Williams produces a perfectly respectable set of bird names for East Africa. Then Britton and friends change them all around. Fine. Just as we're getting used to this, van Perlo appears with a totally different lot. And before anyone has a chance to adjust to *that*, the OS-c produces yet another list that is supposedly definitive. Why all the chopping and changing?

Unfortunately there are sometimes good reasons for altering English names. Things in the ornithological world don't stand still, and our knowledge and understanding of birds is constantly developing. A single species may be split into two or more new ones, or species thought to be separate may be merged together. Birds may be placed in a different genus or even a new family. As taxonomy changes, English names have to keep pace to avoid being inconsistent. More generally, there is a move to try and rationalise English names and make them standard around the world. The same name is often used for different species in different places, and this can lead to confusion. In other cases the name is simply 'wrong' — for instance, the Cuckoo Falcon is not really a falcon (family Falconidae) at all, but a hawk in the family Accipitridae; the Brown-headed Tchagra has a brown crown, not a brown head.

The international committees who are compiling the standard global list of bird names will be considering opinions and existing usage from around the world. The new OS-C list thus represents the East African viewpoint on what we think our birds should be called. Since the new list is going to be the basis of ornithological work from now on (including National Birdmap), it's important that birders become familiar with it. This article points out the key changes from the existing Kenya list, derived from *Birds of East Africa*. It considers only English names, and mainly ignores the underlying taxonomic issues. The observant reader will also note some subtle changes in hyphenation and capitalisation. Absorbing though these issues undoubtedly are (real *aficionados* can become remarkably heated about hyphens), I don't intend to discuss them here.

It's worth making one further point. If you want to defy the weight of received ornithological opinion and call the Baglafecht Weaver a Reichenow's Weaver, or the Grey-backed Camaroptera a Bleating Bush Warbler — well, just go right ahead! You can call your birds what you like, so long as you know what you are talking about. It will be a sad day when the Name Police accompany each Wednesday morning birdwalk to make sure that everyone stays rigidly in line. But if you can, do try and use the accepted name when you send in data or descriptions — that way there's no ambiguity about what you mean.

Name changes

The two races of Ostrich are now recognised as separate species **Common Ostrich** and **Somali Ostrich** (*Struthio camelus* and *S. molybdophanes*, southern pink-legged and northern blue-legged birds, respectively). (New genetic work shows that these two forms may be quite distantly separated.)

There are some variations on Great and Greater:

White Pelican becomes **Great White Pelican**...

...but Great White Egret becomes **Great Egret**;

Greater Cormorant becomes **Great Cormorant**;

Painted Snipe becomes **Greater Painted Snipe**.

A whole rash of species take on the modifier 'African' to distinguish them from similarly-named birds elsewhere in the world:

Darter becomes **African Darter**;

Open-billed Stork becomes **African Open-billed Stork**;

Green Ibis becomes **African Green Ibis**;

Cuckoo Hawk becomes **African Cuckoo Hawk**;

Swallow-tailed Kite becomes **African Swallow-tailed Kite**;

Crowned Eagle becomes **African Crowned Eagle**;

Jacana becomes **African Jacana**;

Wattled Plover becomes **African Wattled Plover**;

Green Pigeon becomes **African Green Pigeon**;
Mourning Dove becomes **African Mourning Dove**;
White-winged Dove becomes **African White-winged Dove**;
Orange-bellied Parrot becomes **African Orange-bellied Parrot**;
Barred Owlet becomes **African Barred Owlet**;
Long-eared Owl becomes **African Long-eared Owl** *Asio abyssinicus*, a new species separate from the Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*;
Cape Grass Owl spreads its wings and becomes **African Grass Owl**;
White-tailed Nightjar becomes **African White-tailed Nightjar**;
Palm Swift becomes **African Palm Swift**;
Black Swift becomes **African Black Swift**;
Pygmy Kingfisher becomes **African Pygmy Kingfisher**;
Grey Hornbill becomes **African Grey Hornbill**;
Dusky Flycatcher becomes **African Dusky Flycatcher**;
Grey Flycatcher becomes **African Grey Flycatcher**;
Moustached Warbler becomes **African Moustached Warbler**;
Blue Flycatcher becomes **African Blue Flycatcher**;
Paradise Flycatcher becomes **African Paradise Flycatcher**;
Shrike Flycatcher becomes **African Shrike-Flycatcher**;
Golden Weaver becomes **African Golden Weaver**;
but African Marsh Owl reverts to just **Marsh Owl**.

Some other species acquire a modifier relating to their Palaearctic origins:
Pintail becomes **Northern Pintail**;
Shoveler becomes **Northern Shoveler**;
Honey Buzzard becomes **Eurasian Honey Buzzard**;
Oystercatcher becomes **Eurasian Oystercatcher**;
Curlew becomes **Eurasian Curlew**;
Turtle Dove becomes **European Turtle Dove**;
Stone Curlew becomes **Eurasian Thick-knee**, in line with the other members of the family (which are now, for some reason, Thick-knees rather than Thicknees);
Reed Warbler becomes **Eurasian Reed Warbler**;
Golden Oriole becomes **Eurasian Golden Oriole**.

And other birds turn Common:
Squacco Heron becomes **Common Squacco Heron**;
Kestrel becomes **Common Kestrel**;
Quail becomes **Common Quail**;
Button Quail becomes **Common Button-Quail**;
Scimitarbill becomes **Common Scimitarbill**;
Redstart becomes **Common Redstart**;

Stonechat becomes **Common Stonechat**;
Rock Thrush becomes **Common Rock Thrush**;
House Martin becomes **Common House Martin**;
Whitethroat becomes **Common Whitethroat**;
Wattle-eye becomes **Common Wattle-eye**;
Waxbill becomes **Common Waxbill**.

A geographical flavour is introduced in a few cases:

Ground Hornbill becomes **Southern Ground Hornbill**;
Yellow-billed Hornbill becomes **Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill**;
Green Tinkerbird becomes **Eastern Green Tinkerbird**;
Bronze-naped Pigeon becomes **Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon**;
Nicator becomes **Eastern Nicator**;
Anteater Chat becomes **Northern Anteater Chat**.
Black Flycatcher *Melaenornis edolioides* is finally given a modifier as **Northern Black Flycatcher**, with its close relative the **Southern Black Flycatcher** *M. pammelaina* (also known as the South African Black Flycatcher) retaining its present name;
Grey Tit becomes **Northern Grey Tit**, while Black Tit becomes **Northern Black Tit**;
White-crowned Shrike becomes **Northern White-crowned Shrike**;
Violet-backed Sunbird becomes **Western Violet-backed Sunbird**.

Common Pratincole becomes **Collared Pratincole**. This is a different bird to the former White-collared Pratincole, which becomes (sensibly enough) **Rock Pratincole**. Common Noddy becomes **Brown Noddy**.

Cape Wigeon becomes **Cape Teal**.

Rüppell's Vulture goes back to **Rüppell's Griffon Vulture**.

The African Reef Heron is now split into two species, the **Dimorphic Egret** *Egretta dimorpha* and the **Western Reef Heron** *E. gularis*. The Dimorphic Egret (also known as Madagascar Egret) is a Malagasy bird that visits the Tanzanian coast in the non-breeding season, and just creeps into the south-eastern corner of Kenya. Western Reef Heron occurs as a non-breeding visitor along the Kenya coast and sporadically inland.

The Short-toed Snake Eagle is split into two species, the familiar **Black-chested Snake Eagle** *Circaetus pectoralis* and the **Short-toed Snake Eagle** *C. gallicus* itself. The latter is a rare visitor to north-western Kenya.

The Eastern Red-footed Falcon *Falco amurensis* becomes **Amur Falcon** — less of a mouthful. White-eyed Kestrel becomes **Greater Kestrel**.

Kenya Crested Guineafowl *Guttera pucherani* and Crested Guineafowl *G. edouardi* are merged into one species, **Crested Guineafowl** *G. pucherani*.

All the Pygmy Crakes are now called **Flufftails**.

Lesser Spotted Crake is now called **Baillon's Crake**.

Allen's Gallinule stays unchanged, but Purple Gallinule will henceforth be known as **Purple Swamphen** — to avoid confusion with the American Purple Gallinule.

Grey Crowned Crane *Balearica regulorum* is now properly distinguished from the **Black Crowned Crane** *B. pavonina* of the Lake Turkana area.

Buff-crested Bustard becomes, simply, **Crested Bustard**.

Avocet becomes **Pied Avocet**.

The resident race of Cream-coloured Courser has now been split off as **Somali Courser** *Cursorius somalensis*, while Palaeartic birds remain as **Cream-coloured Courser** *C. cursor*.

Mongolian Sandplover becomes **Lesser Sandplover**

Knot becomes **Red Knot** and Turnstone becomes **Ruddy Turnstone**

Little Tern is split into the Palaearctic **Little Tern** *Sterna albifrons* and **Saunders' Tern** *S. saundersi* — a field identification challenge if there ever was one!

Violet-crested Turaco changes a shade and becomes **Purple-crested Turaco**.

The Lesser Cuckoo (not a bird that many people have seen in East Africa) is split into the **Asian Lesser Cuckoo** *Cuculus poliocephalus* and **Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo** *C. rochii*.

Didric Cuckoo bows to South African convention and becomes **Diederik Cuckoo** — harder to spell but easier to say.

Scops Owl is split into **African Scops Owl** *Otus senegalensis* and **Eurasian Scops Owl** *O. scops*.

Just when you have got used to calling it Chestnut-bellied Kingfisher, it's back to... yes, **Grey-headed Kingisher** again. Wait long enough and all the old names come back into fashion...

If you are birdwatching in North-eastern Province, keep an eye out for wood-hoopoes as well as bandits — they might be **Black-billed Wood Hoopoes** *Phoeniculus somaliensis*, split from **Green Wood Hoopoe** *P. purpureus*.

Spotted-flanked Barbet becomes **Spot-flanked Barbet**, but Usambiro Barbet disappears from the list, being merged again with **D'Arnaud's Barbet**.

Black-throated Honeyguide becomes **Greater Honeyguide**

Mombasa Woodpecker *Campethera mombassica* is a new species confined to the coast, split from **Golden-tailed Woodpecker** *C. abingoni*, now found only in the south-western corner of Kenya. The Little Spotted Woodpecker becomes **Green-backed Woodpecker** and Uganda Spotted Woodpecker becomes **Speckle-breasted Woodpecker**.

All of the Bush Larks lose their Bush except **Singing Bushlark** *Mirafra cantillans*. The Northern White-tailed Bush Lark is now more

straightforwardly just **White-tailed Lark**. Short-toed Lark is now **Greater Short-toed Lark** (it hasn't been seen since 1964 anyway), and the Rufous Short-toed Lark (which, at least in Kenya, isn't remotely rufous) becomes **Somali Short-toed Lark**. Short-crested Lark *Galerida malabarica* becomes **Thekla Lark** *G. theklae*.

African Sand Martin is appropriately renamed **Plain Martin**, while Eurasian Swallow is (more euphoniously, and more accurately) renamed **Barn Swallow**. Taking into account the rest of the continent's birds, Striped Swallow becomes **Lesser Striped Swallow**. To avoid confusion with American birds of the same name, the rough-wings have been re-named **saw-wings**.

An old familiar, Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae* becomes **Grassland Pipit** *A. cinnamomeus*: this form has been split from the Palaearctic birds as a separate species. Meanwhile the Little Tawny Pipit acquires a simpler name, **Bush Pipit** (it looks nothing like the Tawny Pipit anyway).

It's all change again for the Olive Mountain or Placid Greenbul *Phyllastrephus placidus* which has been merged with **Cabanis's Greenbul** *P. cabanisi*. The Brownbul acquires a modifier as **Terrestrial Brownbul**.

Among the babblers, Hinde's Pied Babbler reverts to simply **Hinde's Babbler**.

Grey-winged Ground Robin is now just **Grey-winged Robin**, but the ordinary Robin Chat acquires an exotic touch as the **Cape Robin-Chat**. The Morning Thrush is now, more descriptively, **Collared Palm Thrush**.

Following a taxonomic split, our Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens* (or Schalow's Wheatear, as the Kenyan sub-species has been called in the past) becomes the **Abyssinian Black Wheatear** *O. lugubris*. Red-breasted Wheatear *O. bottae* is also split, and our birds become **Heuglin's Wheatear** *O. heuglini*.

Cliff Chat becomes **White-shouldered Cliff Chat** (to distinguish it from other species, such as the White-winged Cliff Chat of Ethiopia).

Northern Olive Thrush *Turdus abyssinicus* becomes just **Olive Thrush** *T. olivaceus*, but Taita Thrush *T. (o) helleri* is recognised (with some hesitation shown by those brackets) as a distinct species.

Fan-tailed Warbler becomes **Broad-tailed Warbler**, preventing confusion with other Fan-tailed Warblers elsewhere.

Yellow Warbler is now more descriptively labelled **Dark-capped Yellow Warbler**.

And now the moment everyone has been waiting for: yes, it's a new cisticola! The race *angusticauda* of the Tabora Cisticola *Cisticola fulvicapilla* has been raised to species level as the **Long-tailed Cisticola** *C. angusticauda*. Meanwhile, the Wailing Cisticola *C. lais* has stopped lamenting, at least in

Kenya where the race *distinctus* has been raised to species status as **Lyne's Cisticola**, after the admirable Admiral who first monographed this group. If you want to hear *real* Wailing Cisticolas you will now have to travel to southern Tanzania. In what some may see as craven submission to the South African viewpoint, Tinkling Cisticola becomes **Levaillant's Cisticola**, in line with usage in that part of the world. To be fair, they already have their own Tinkling Cisticola, *C. rufilens*.

The wren warblers have been moved to their own genus, *Calamonastes*, and as an extra bit of largesse the Grey Wren Warbler is split into two species: the **Grey Wren Warbler** *C. simplex* and the **Pale Wren Warbler** *C. undosus*. The latter is confined to the south-west corner of the country, around the Loita Hills and Masai Mara — the same sort of area where the Usambiro Barbet *used* to occur.

The **monarch flycatchers** have their own new family, the **Monarchidae**, that includes the Paradise and Crested Flycatchers. This distinctive group is no longer thought to be closely related to the ordinary flycatchers. The Crested Flycatcher itself becomes **Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher**.

The **batises, wattle-eyes and relatives** acquire a new family too — the **Platysteiridae**. The only name change here is that East Coast Batis becomes **Pale Batis**.

Among the Prionopidae, the Helmet Shrike becomes **White-crested Helmet-Shrike**. In the Malaconotidae, the Brown-headed and Black-headed Tchagras become, more accurately, **Brown-capped** and **Black-capped Tchagras**, respectively. The Grey-green Bush Shrike *Malaconotus bocagei* becomes, more manageably, **Bocage's Bush Shrike**. The Kenya race of the Many-coloured Bush Shrike, *M. multicolor*, is now recognised again as a distinct species, the **Black-fronted Bush Shrike** *M. nigrifrons*. Rosy-patched Shrike becomes **Rosy-patched Bush-Shrike**, making clear which family it is in.

Among the drongos, the forest-dwelling **Velvet-mantled Drongo** *Dicrurus modestus* is split from the more widespread **Common Drongo** *D. adsimilis*.

Waller's Chestnut-winged Starling and Slender-billed Chestnut-winged Starling become (mercifully!) just **Waller's Starling** and **Slender-billed Starling**. Typesetters of bird lists will breathe a sigh of relief. Similarly, all the Glossy Starlings lose their gloss — so for instance we have just **Lesser Blue-eared Starling** rather than the Lesser Blue-eared Glossy version. The Black-breasted Glossy Starling has finally been seen by someone with a grasp of anatomical basics (i.e., who can tell breasts from bellies): it is now the **Black-bellied Starling**. The Blue-eared Glossy Starling becomes the **Greater Blue-eared Starling** to distinguish it from its smaller and rarer relative.

Mariqua Sunbird has obviously been mis-spelled too many times and becomes **Marico Sunbird**. Little Purple-banded Sunbird becomes just **Purple-banded Sunbird** (there isn't a Big Purple Banded Sunbird, hence no confusion). Similarly, Smaller Black-bellied Sunbird is now simply **Black-bellied Sunbird**. The Violet-breasted Sunbird has been split into two species, the **Pemba Sunbird** *Nectarinia pembae* (endemic to Pemba) and the **Violet-breasted Sunbird** *N. chalcomelas* of the Kenya coast and hinterland.

The sparrows and petronias now luxuriate in their own, small family, the Passeridae. Other weavers and weaver-like birds are in the Ploceidae still.

Jubaland Weaver loses its colonial ring and becomes just **Juba Weaver**, while Golden-backed Weaver turns, rather grandly, into **Jackson's Golden-backed Weaver**. Masked Weaver becomes **Lesser Masked Weaver**.

Marsh Widowbird *Euplectes hartlaubi* has been split, and the Kenyan birds become **Hartlaub's Marsh Widowbird**, with the same scientific name.

Black-faced Waxbill has also been split into two species: the southern **Black-faced Waxbill** *Estrilda erythronotus* and the more northern and eastern **Black-cheeked Waxbill** *E. charmosyna*.

Cut-throat is now called **Cut-throat Finch**, which at least makes clear what sort of a bird it is...

The indigobirds are always a rich source of confusion. The former list called each species after the firefinch it parasitised — a laudable idea but in practice both long-winded and baffling to the uninitiated. Now instead we have **Village Indigobird** *Vidua chalybeata* (the old genus *Hypochera* has been merged in *Vidua*), which parasitises the Red-billed Firefinch; **Purple Indigobird** *V. purpurascens,* which parasitises Jameson's Firefinch; and **Variable Indigobird** *V. funerea* which parasitises African Firefinch (so far this last species has only been identified in Kenya from recordings of singing birds in the Kerio Valley: good luck!).

The Grosbeak Canary is also split into two species: the rarely recorded **Northern Grosbeak Canary** *S. donaldsoni* and the more familiar **Southern Grosbeak Canary** *S. buchanani*.

Now all we need is a comprehensive synonymy that will link up all the names in Williams, Britton, van Perlo and the new checklist. Any volunteers??

Book reviews

Collins illustrated checklist: Birds of eastern Africa, by Ber van Perlo. HarperCollins, London, 1995. 301 pp, 96 colour plates, many maps. KSh 895/= (EANHS members' price).

The appearance of a new bird guide for the eastern African region is quite an event. Apart from the guide by Guggisberg (revised single-volume edition, 1990), which described only a small selection of species, there has been nothing since the second edition of J. G. Williams' *Field Guide to the Birds of East Africa* (also published by Collins) which first appeared as long ago as 1980, More recent reissues of this guide have been cunningly published with different cover designs, but the contents are identical. In any case, the text of Williams Mark 2 was essentially unchanged from the original version of 1963 — meaning that the standard field guide for the region gives nomenclature, taxonomy and distribution notes that are now nearly 35 years out of date. Add to this Williams' highly idiosyncratic selection of species to describe and illustrate, and the vagueness of much of the information ('fairly common and widely distributed in East and Central Africa' is a typical status note) and the result is very far from satisfactory.

This could perhaps all have been forgiven if the only really 'new' aspect of that book, the colour plates by Norman Arlott, were up to scratch. However, these are of such dismal quality, and so misleading to beginners, that it has been impossible to avoid casting envious glances further south. The southern African region now has several excellent field guides, comprehensively and accurately illustrated — almost an embarassment of riches, compared to the complete dearth of adequate books available here.

All this may be about to change. What should be the definitive handbook for Kenyan birds, by Dale Zimmermann, Don Turner and David Pearson, is awaited with bated breath — it is expected to appear in June this year. There are rumbles to the effect that a regional field guide by Terry Stevenson and John Fanshawe will also be on the bookshop shelves in the not-too-distant future, with illustrations by — believe it or not — the unhappy Norman Arlott once again (let's hope that practice makes perfect). Meanwhile Ber van Perlo has been working away quietly and unobtrusively since 1982 on his illustrated checklist, which Collins has just brought out with a modest amount of fanfare.

Van Perlo's book is an astonishing achievement. Every species in eastern Africa — Socotra, Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia included — is illustrated in glorious colour, and its distribution mapped. There is also information on identification, habitat, altitudinal range, abundance and (in most

cases) voice — all put together by one person, and fitting into a neat portable volume that is significantly more compact than Williams.

'Every species' means just that. If you ever wanted to see what the Bulo Burti Boubou, Tana River Cisticola, Ankober Serin or Prigogine's Ground Thrush actually *look* like, there they are, sitting demurely on the plates just like any other everyday bird. If you feel the urge to compare all the chestnut-winged starlings, there are eight of them (including the Socotra Chestnut-winged) lined up on plate 86. Ever wondered what the differences were between the races of Baglafecht Weaver? You can compare four of them (*reichenowi, baglafecht, emini* and *stuhlmanni*) on plate 90. In fact, one feels that the author's zeal may have been taken to slightly excessive lengths — there are even pictures of Arabian Chukar (not recorded in Africa since 1890) and Grey-headed Lovebird (an introduced species in Zanzibar last seen in 1920).

There are a lot of birds in eastern Africa, and the 96 plates are quite crowded — many show 20 or more species. This means that each individual illustration is small, but such is the standard of the printing and artwork that this is less of a problem that one might imagine. Van Perlo successfully captures 'jizz'; the birds look alive on the page, without the stuffed or wooden quality that field guide illustrations so often display. Inevitably some plates are more successful than others. The sunbirds are rather too itsy-bitsy for comfort, the species differences shown among the greenbuls are hugely optimistic, and some things are just plain wrong — like the crown of the Tiny Cisticola or the eye of the Lesser Masked Weaver. There is also a general tendency for olive-green (as on some weavers, greenbuls and canaries) to become a shade of grey. Despite lapses of this sort, the illustrations represent a quantum leap in completeness and accuracy over anything available up until now.

Opposite each plate is a set of species accounts. These are brief and to the point — just a line or two in most cases — and give size, brief identification points where appropriate (on plumage, but not behaviour), habitat and altitudinal range, and in many cases voice. The author has evidently tried very hard to notate voices accurately. I guess that once familiar with his style the descriptions could become quite useful, but I remain to be convinced. There is no doubt that describing voices is a fiendishly difficult task, and many readers may find the descriptions a bit baffling. Here for instance is the Orange Ground Thrush: "high, loud, piping whistles '*tututjuweehêehêetju*', very high fluted '*fiu fiufiu fiu-few-tjee*'". I was especially intrigued by the voice of the African Pied Hornbill, which occurs in Uganda, described by van Perlo as an "extra high, rather short, '*fjuck-fjuck-fjuck-fjuckfjuck-fjuckfjuckfjuckfjuckfjuck*'". I shall have to listen carefully next time I am across the border.

Approximate abundance (within the species' usual range) is ingeniously indicated by means of a colour code for the species number on the plates. This is quite handy as an immediate indication of whether or not one may have spotted something rare.

Some plates have rather little text opposite them, while others run over to additional pages — sometimes forwards, sometimes backwards, which can be mildly irritating at times. The text itself is generally accurate and helpful, although a few odd errors creep in. Most of these are probably typographical: when Lagden's Bush-shrike (plate 83) is described as endemic to Tanzania, this presumably refers to the previous species (the Uluguru Bush-shrike). Some of the odd errors are really odd, however. Clarke's Weaver is described as "not social (breeds in single pairs)", which will be news to the ornithological community (its nesting habits are totally unknown) and misleading to first-time observers (it often forages in large noisy groups).

Each plate is linked to a set of maps, placed together at the rear of the book. These indicate migratory status (with generalised arrows), range and, through shading, approximate abundance. The maps are no bigger than thumbnail sketches, so the level of detail is necessarily low, but they do give a useful idea of range. A larger map is given for reference, but this is disappointingly sketchy and will be of little help. The shaded areas only cover the region, so ranges seem to stop abruptly at national borders — it would have been less confusing if the surrounding countries had been left out, or hatched to show they were not covered. Single-site records are shown by crosses, without any distinction between vagrants and resident populations restricted to a small area — a pity, given how much other information is shoe-horned into the book. Be warned that, as with the text, some maps seem to have been transposed and now refer to the wrong species. Better check with Britton's *Birds of East Africa* as well before jumping to conclusions.

Birders who are used to Williams and Britton will find some of the names used here a little strange. For instance, the seed-eaters and most of the canaries are called 'serins', while the *Vanellus* plovers have become 'lapwings'. Generally the nomenclature follows the 1990 checklist by Short, Horne and Muringo-Gichuki, which has not yet found wide acceptance in East Africa. The imminent appearance of a new standard list (which will be followed, for Kenya, by the Zimmermann, Turner and Pearson handbook) threatens to make life even more confusing (*see elsewhere in this issue*). Until a table of synonymy appears, birders will just have to cope as best they can.

The book is titled an 'illustrated checklist', not a field guide. Although it manages to pack a lot of information into a small space, this description is fair. The only identification information is in the plates and the short notes; those who

are used to Williams will find themselves instinctively trying to turn to a longer account in the text, which of course isn't there! Nonetheless, this is going to be an enormously useful book for any birder in eastern Africa, and probably the one text that gets carried on active birding in the field. Your Palaearctic guide can be consigned to the reference shelf; those venturing to western Uganda or Ethiopia will be able to identify the species they see without lugging several kilos of Mackworth-Praed and Grant; beginners can at last be confident that the illustrations bear at least a reasonable resemblance to the birds they claim to represent.

The book is not perfect, though, and should be used with some care. Don't throw away your copy of Williams: the descriptions of many species, and his identification hints, will still come in very handy. And I strongly recommend that anyone using this book in Kenya also buys a copy of Britton's *Birds of East Africa*, which contains invaluable information on distribution and status to amplify what is on the maps. Fortunately, the EANHS is bundling Britton with van Perlo in an irresistable birder's package, just KSh 995/= for the two from the Society's office. What are you waiting for?! — *Leon Bennun, Box 40658, Nairobi.*

A photographic guide to birds of East Africa, by Dave Richards. New Holland, London & Cape Town, 1995. 144 pp, many colour photographs. KSh 520/= (EANHS members' price).

This compact, pocket-sized book is the first full-blooded photographic guide to the birds of East Africa. While only picturing 265 species out of 1,350 found in the region, it does good justice to them.

The first thing that strikes you about the book is the excellence of the photographs. Nearly all are crisply focussed and well lit, showing the important identification features — some, like the Pearl-spotted Owlet, are really 'crippling'. Birds rarely behave exactly as you want them to for a photograph, as can be seen in one or two — for instance the Red-faced Crombec hiding its very short tail, the main characteristic of that genus. This book has a higher percentage of top quality photographs than many other comparable photographic guides, though there are exceptions such as the Black Kite in flight which is only a silhouette (surprising since it is such a common bird around Nairobi).

The text is brief but sufficient, pin-pointing the main identifying features for the bird pictured with particular characteristics of the species neatly highlighted in italics. There are one or two inaccuracies if one is to quibble — the Tawny-flanked Prinia has a conspicuous pale supercilium rather than an eye-stripe, i.e. a line *above* the eye, not through it (c.f. the definition of an eye-stripe in the book's

short glossary). This is rather more unfortunate in that it is almost the one photograph in which the vital feature cannot be seen due to bad lighting! Other, similar species that are not pictured are also sometimes mentioned which adds a few to the 265. The habitat that the bird can be found in is described for all species, and this can be matched to a (very coarse) habitat map in the back of the book. A short description of the bird's voice is given for some of the more vocal species and for the odd one or two, a tit-bit about some interesting behaviour the bird exhibits.

The maps are very crude but sufficient to give a rough idea of a species' distribution and are usefully placed alongside the text for each species. The glossary at the end is handy and the 'thumbnail silhouettes' at the top of each page a nice idea, though it is debatable whether they are useful for someone who isn't very familiar with her or his bird families.

All told, it is not a book for anyone serious about identifying most of the birds they can see in East Africa. It is, however, a very handy, nicely produced book that is perfect for your average tourist or anyone with a vague interest in the more obvious birds to be seen on the 'tourist trail'. As such it is a worthwhile purchase for anyone visiting or living in East Africa who would like to identify the more common birds they see. — *Colin Jackson, Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Threatened birds of Kenya 7: Corncrake

Leon Bennun
P O Box 40658, Nairobi

The rasping call of the Corncrake (*Crex crex*) was once a familiar sound of the European spring. No longer. Changes in agricultural practice have spelt disaster for this species, which nests on the ground in long grass meadows. In the past, the birds had already finished nesting by the time the grass came to be cut. These days the grass is harvested much earlier so that it can be converted into silage: a more efficient way of feeding livestock but no fun for the corncrakes. To make matters worse, the harvesting is done by machines, and often by cutting towards the centre of the field in ever-decreasing circles — offering the birds no means of escape.

As a result, the breeding population of Corncrakes has plummeted, and it is now a rare bird over most of its extensive range. The effects of reduced breeding

success have been made worse by the trapping of large numbers of birds on migration. In 1991, for example, no less than 4,600 Corncrakes are thought to have been caught as they passed through Egypt. For these reasons, the Corncrake is listed as Vulnerable in the global list of threatened birds.

Corncrakes are stout, chunky birds in the family Rallidae, the rails and crakes. They closely resemble the more familiar African Crake, *Crex egregia*, which is also a bird of wet and dry grassland. However, the Corncrake is larger and warmer in colour, with a big rufous patch in the wing (especially obvious in flight) and a rufous tinge to the bars on its flanks. As befits a long-distance migrant, the Corncrake's wings are also longer and less rounded than those of the African Crake.

In Kenya, Corncrakes are mainly passage migrants, moving to and from their wintering grounds in southern Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and eastern South Africa. They have been recorded coming to the lights at Ngulia (as many as four on one night!), and the Bird Atlas shows a smattering of records (many of them old) across the south and west of the country. The likeliest place to find them is in open grassy areas, sometimes close to marshes or rivers but rarely in places that are wet underfoot. They are skulking birds, however, and not at all easy to detect unless they are flushed from underfoot. Nearly all Kenyan records are in the months October-December and March-April, reflecting the two peaks of passage.

What can be done to protect a long-distance migrant like the Corncrake? This is a case where international treaties and agreements, such as the Bonn Convention, come into play. Although other grassland birds in Kenya are becoming threatened by habitat alteration, it is likely that this is not yet a major problem for Corncrakes on their relatively brief journey through. In Europe, organisations like the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds are working hard to ensure that the call of the Corncrake is not silenced forever. They are having some success: in 1994, the number of Corncrakes in Britain increased for the first time this century. Thorough research has shown what the breeding birds need — but trying to bring about the necessary changes in farming practice is still a real challenge.

Request for information: Colour-ringed gulls and avocets

The Voorne Bird Observatory in the Netherlands has sent information on gulls that have been colour-ringed in the south-west Netherlands, eastern Europe, Russia and Scandinavia. Some of these birds might visit Kenya during the northern winter.

The species that might possibly appear in Kenya include:

Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus* and 'Yellow-legged Gulls' *Larus cachinnans* (formerly considered a race of Herring Gull *L. argentatus*) from the Netherlands have been marked with a single **white, orange** or **green** engraved PVC ring, or a combination of two rings (one on each tarsus).

Avocets from the Netherlands have been marked with a single **white** or **green** engraved PVC ring.

'Yellow-legged Gulls' from Poland, Romania and Ukraine have been marked with a single **red** engraved PVC ring.

'Siberian' Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus heuglini* and 'Taimyr Gulls' *Larus taimyrensis* (both formerly treated as races of the Herring Gull!) from Russia and Siberia haeve been marked with a single **white** or **red** engraved PVC ring.

Lesser Black-backed Gulls from the Faroes, Iceland, Norway and Spain have been marked with a single **blue** or **orange** engraved PVC ring.

Note that some white or orange rings may become stained, and will appear more yellowish or rusty coloured.

If you see a gull or an avocet with a ring, please send in the details (species — if you can sort out the terrible mess there seems to be in gull taxonomy! — date, locality, ring colour(s) and position) to the Ornithology Department, who will forward the record to the Voorne Observatory.

Migrating White Storks — *Mark Andrews, courtesy of the African Bird Club*

Egyptian Vulture — *Mark Andrews, courtesy of the African Bird Club*

Request for information: Egyptian Vultures

I am a student intending to undertake a Master of Philosophy degree in Moi University. My thesis will involve a research project on the ecology and status of the Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) in Hell's Gate National Park. The major aim of the project is to accumulate reliable data on breeding and ranging patterns of this species. This is important in making recommendations necessary to prevent population declines or even local extinction, as witnessed in the species' southern range and elsewhere. Due to the small number of breeding pairs (probably fewer than five within the park itself), I may also need to study pairs outside Hell"s Gate but occurring in areas where the habitat is generally similar, and also within the central Rift Valley because of the logistics of the study. To help with my study I am requesting information about breeding dates, nest site locations, breeding pair locations, fledgling sightings, roost sites and general local ranges for this species within the last five years. Any such information will be fully acknowledged. Please write to: *Benard Mburu Chege, Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Events and Announcements

Wednesday Morning Bird Walks led by Fleur Ng'weno and Damaris Rotich continue weekly. Meet at 8:45 am at the National Museums entrance for a walk in the Nairobi area. These walks are for EANHS members: non-members are welcome but requested to join the Society (see below).

The East Africa Natural History Society offers lectures, excursions and publications with a strong bird focus and organises ringing and nest record schemes in Eastern Africa. For membership details: tel. 749957, or write to the Hon. Secretary, EANHS, P O Box 44486 Nairobi. The office at the National Museums of Kenya is open each weekday 09:30 to 16:00 (closed Friday afternoon).

For sale in the EANHS office: **NEW!! Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of East Africa,** by Ber van Perlo; **Arabuko-Sokoke Forest: the Official Guide**; plus a wide selection of recently-published natural history and conservation books; also posters, postcards and T-shirts.

Scopus, the lively regional journal of ornithology, is published three times a year by the EANHS Ornithological Sub-committee. Contact Don Turner, P O Box 48019, Nairobi, Kenya (tel. Nairobi 48133). Annual subscription KSh 600 (KSh 650 up-country); write for overseas rates. Records are welcomed from the East African Bird Report which forms the third issue of *Scopus* each year.

African Bird Club. The ABC produces an excellent colour Bulletin and provides a worldwide focus for African ornithology. For membership details, write to: African Bird Club, c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Rd., Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK. Membership presently costs UK £12 per year.

Ninth Pan-African Ornithological Congress, 1–8 December 1996, Accra, Ghana. For further information write to the Congress Chairman, Yaa Ntiamoa-Baidu, Ghana Wildlife Society, P O Box 13252, Accra, Ghana. Closing date for conference abstracts is 30 June.

EANHS Nest Record Card Scheme. For information and cards, contact the Nest Record Scheme Organiser, Joseph Oyugi, at the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya (address below).

Contacts: For *Kenya Birds*, write to the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi, or telephone 742131/61, extension 243. For BirdLife Kenya, telephone Nairobi 749957; fax 741049.

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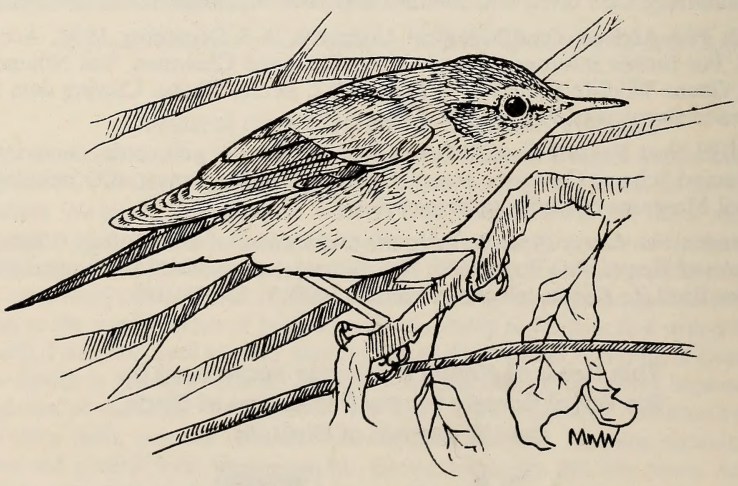

Marsh Warbler — *Martin Woodcock*